

DICTATOR'S DESTINY

WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

This is one of the most amazing stories ever published.

Hitler's affection for astrologers has long been known—he has consulted them before making all his major decisions. Suppose, at a critical phase of the war, *a British Secret Service agent had insinuated himself into the post of Hitler's astrologer, to give the Führer the wrong advice at the right moment!*

This is the startling theme of this thrilling story, original and vivid in its scope. Its background is sensational but accurate—the author actually met Hitler and all his clique—and his picture of life at Berchtesgaden is full of interest. The main feature of the yarn, however, is its excitement and drama, as the British spy gradually imposes his will upon Hitler—with the aid of Nostradamus and other seers!

This is a book which is likely to create a sensation.

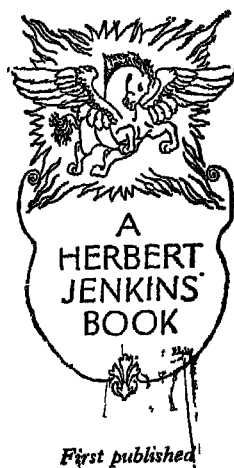
By the same Author

THE ESCAPE OF GENERAL GERARD
BALKAN SPY
CAST IRON ALIBI
SCOTLAND YARD ALIBI

DICTATOR'S DESTINY

By
DON BETTERIDGE

HERBERT JENKINS LIMITED
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*All the characters in this book are purely imaginary
and have no relation whatsoever to any living persons.*

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED
IN COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH
THE AUTHORISED ECONOMY STANDARDS

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CHAPTER ONE

THE home of the Military Intelligence department of the War Office does not look like the headquarters of a vast and complicated spy organisation. As you walked down the west-end street, you would never pick out the house from its neighbours. If you were elderly, you might regret the hasty march of time, and recall the street in its more gracious days. Then each house was the home of a prosperous Victorian family: stiff-waisted nursemaids pushed high-wheeled perambulators to the Gardens nearby, while the horsed vehicles of the tradesmen delivered the substantial and unrationed quotas of goods to the basements of the many-storied residences.

Your nostalgic recollections of the past would be shocked back into hasty contact with the present. Save for an occasional caretaker, the street is no longer lined by residences. The houses are now converted into offices: you would read some famous names on the doorplates as you walked the length of the street.

One of them would attract but little attention: the neatly painted sign reads BRITISH EMPIRE SECURITIES, LTD.* Should you be interested enough to pass inside, you would be shown into a comfortable waiting-room. In due course, a well-groomed business man would receive you and, if he thought that you justified the effort, might endeavour to get you interested in the purchase of Empire stocks and shares, of which his subsidiary companies offer a large and excellent variety. The suite of offices is, indeed, exactly what it purports to be.

If you were especially observant, however, you would notice one minor distinction. The buildings on either side house several firms—one on each floor, as the nameplates show. This particular house indicates only the headquarters of British Empire Securities, Ltd. You would see only the interview room on the ground floor: or the one next to it, occupied by the manager. You would assume that the floors up above were occupied by clerks, but you would be wrong.

In a third-floor room—it had been a children's nursery in Victorian days—two men stood by the window. To one man the view was familiar, yet he never tired of it: the long street of substantial

* The name is fictitious. D.B.

grey houses, so formal and correct : at the end, a vista of the trees and flowers of Kensington Gardens. The second man regarded the view with wide open eyes. You might have said that he made you think of an exile recently returned to the London he loved : and this time you would not have been wrong.

The first man was rather short, and spare of frame. You would not have recognised his face—unless you had been a senior officer of the German Secret Service from the Tiergartenstrasse in Berlin. This man was Colonel Metcalfe : his official classification was D.M.I., W.E.—which meant that he was the director of our military intelligence service covering Western Europe : the geographical term included Germany.

His companion was taller, and of powerful build. Neither his face nor his name would have conjured up any association in your mind, for the first essential of the Secret Service is that it should be secret. But in another office in Berlin they knew quite a lot about him—an unpretentious building in the Wilhelmstrasse, which housed the headquarters of the German counter-espionage organisation. Yes, they knew a lot about Captain Lester there—but, as they would ruefully admit, they did not know nearly enough.

"Tiger" Lester, his friends called him—the name had attached itself at school : not because at that time he had shown unusual courage, but because his school was famous for its rugby football, and the Leicester "Tigers" were among their heroes. Now, his friends complained, they seldom saw him—he was always gadding about. Very few of them knew or even suspected that he was one of the best Secret Service agents Britain ever had—and we have been very fortunate in our men. An "ace operative," the American press would have dubbed him, and for once its extravagant phraseology would not have been inappropriate.

"I can just imagine your thoughts, Lester," Metcalfe was saying. "I remember how London looked when I came back after three years in Iraq——"

"The outlook isn't the same," Lester smiled. "You knew that you were coming back from Iraq, barring accidents. I didn't expect to get back at all from my last job."

"That's true. It's a grand feeling, to be home. Your nerve is good, Lester, I'll say that. Here you are, after experiences which would have made nervous wrecks of most men——"

"Just a minute ! I'm suspicious. This sounds like the preliminaries to another job."

"Oh, you're going to have a long leave, don't worry. These sojourns in enemy territory take more out of you than you know."

"That confirms it! There is another job. Come on—out with it."

"We'll talk about it in a month's time, when you've had a good rest."

"We'll talk about it now, if you don't mind. There'll be no rest for me until I know."

"I'm sorry I brought it up at this stage."

"Don't worry—there's no real rest in wartime, anyway. Well, what is it?"

"I want to make it quite clear, Lester, that this is *not* an assignment, but only a suggestion. It is a fantastic scheme—I doubt if a fiction writer dare tackle it, because he could never make it appear possible. Yet if it did come off—"

"It's big, eh?"

"Bigger than that. Easily the biggest thing of the war."

"Come on, then—I'm waiting."

"You started it off yourself, really. You remember when you went to the Palace four months ago?"

Lester nodded. He was not likely to forget the thrill of the moment when the King had pinned the D.S.O. to his tunic. A strange ceremony: there was no line of brave men, with proud relatives watching the scene. It is unusual for Secret Service men to be honoured until hostilities are over, but Lester's latest exploit had been of such great value to the Allied cause that the normal rule had been waived. No details were given in the *London Gazette*. Captain Lester was awarded the D.S.O., for "consummate gallantry in face of overwhelming enemy opposition"—a complete understatement, in view of the fact that Lester had fought the German Secret Service on its own ground for many weeks, and alone. The King had received him in private when conferring the decoration, but Lester would not have exchanged those few minutes for all the ceremonial parades in the world.

"You remember the party we had afterwards?" Colonel Metcalfe was saying.

"Very well. Podger Cholmondeley enjoyed it thoroughly, I recollect."

"He did!" Metcalfe grinned. "We had to send him home in a taxi. In one way your friend Cholmondeley started off the case. You remember his remarking that he was expecting something

disagreeable to happen to him that day, since he had read his horoscope covering the week in a Sunday newspaper, which had warned him."

"It was right," Lester grinned. "Podger was very sick that night—most unpleasant."

"We pulled his leg, of course, about astrologers. Then went on to discuss more seriously the harm these astrologers could do—how they breed complacency, since their nit-wit clients will only pay good money for cheerful news. I mentioned the case of a woman fortune-teller we had rounded up. She used to be consulted by anxious relatives of service men—and easily dragged details of their movements from their loving wives and mothers. Then you chipped in with a joke. How dare I call these clients nit-wits, you said, when Hitler himself used astrologers and fortune-tellers freely? What a chance, you exclaimed, if we could only get at one of Hitler's tame astrologers, who would tell him what we wanted him to think."

"I see!" said Lester, very quietly. "And now you have a chance of getting at one of Hitler's astrologers? Well, I suggested the idea as a joke, true, but if it came off—yes, it would be the biggest thing of the war, as you suggest."

"Yes—one idea put into Hitler's mind at the right moment!"

"The possibilities are endless—and they *are* possibilities, Metcalfe. Hitler is still the big noise in Germany, and he follows his intuitions even against the advice of his generals. Yes, if you can work up something like this, you've got the outstanding idea in the history of espionage. Well, who is the astrologer? Have you got him in the bag already? Or do you want me to go into Germany to contact him?"

"No, Lester. I don't want you to contact an astrologer—I want you to go into Germany and *be* the astrologer."

"What?" Lester cried, staring at his companion as if he were mad.

"I thought that would startle even you," Metcalfe smiled. "But that's my idea."

"But it's fantastic!"

"That's what I said earlier," Metcalfe agreed. "Of course, you can turn it down——"

"How can I turn it down until I hear all about it? But how can I pose as an astrologer—I don't know the first thing about the game."

"You can learn—I have good tutors available—if you take on the job."

"But even if I did, how on earth do I get anywhere near Hitler?" Lester demanded. "You know, Metcalfe, it isn't easy to get within a mile of him these days. He may be crazy on the stars, but he picks his astrologers very carefully."

"I know that. I cannot guarantee that you would ever get near to Hitler. But I can offer you a sporting chance."

Metcalfe knew his man: Lester had never asked for more than this. The older man now tried to drop the subject—suggested that they should discuss it further when his colleague had had a good rest. Yet he knew that Lester's curiosity was thoroughly aroused.

Lester sat down in the comfortable interview chair. Evidently he was very much at home in Colonel Metcalfe's room, for he pulled open a drawer and revealed a box of cigarettes. Both men lit up: there was a moment of tense silence before Metcalfe began to speak.

"You know how an idea gets hold of you—dominates your mind," he said. "Your joke about Hitler's astrologers just stuck—it wouldn't go away. All through the night after that party I was thinking it over. As usual with such ideas, I skipped a few nasty and awkward details—I could see our astrologer already planted in Hitler's entourage, advising him to attack when he ought to have retreated. I didn't sleep a wink—but it was a very interesting night, nevertheless."

"So it went on for days—and more nights. You were off on your new job—I wouldn't have mentioned anything to you, anyway—one job at a time is ample: especially one of the type you were tackling. Besides, the whole thing was ridiculous—just one of those escapist ideas which grip your mind when you should be facing cold and awkward facts. So I tried to forget it: intermittently, I did. I got to the stage when I could laugh at it, which is always a good sign. Then, nine weeks ago Wernski came to see me."

"The Pole?"

"Yes. He is doing a grand job."

Lester agreed. The British Secret Service has no lack of willing helpers in the occupied countries of Europe. The German gauleiter in France once complained bitterly to his French subordinates that everything he did was known in London within forty-eight hours. One of the Frenchmen corrected him—it was known in London within twenty-four hours, he said.

In the story of resistance to the conqueror, of the organisation of sabotage, of preparation for the coming of battle, all the occupied countries carry their share of honour. But in espionage the Poles

have pride of place. In the border regions were tens of thousands who spoke German as well as their own language. Inside Germany there were nearly a million people of Polish blood. They spoke the language, had all the rights and privileges of citizenship—including that of conscription into the German armies—but they remained Poles. With their unique opportunities, some of these people have done a great job for the Allied cause: others bide their time. Their courage has been unbounded, their cleverness superb: to them riches counted for nothing.

Wernski was an outstanding man among them.* A German subject, he had volunteered for espionage work for Poland before the war. The rapid defeat of his country had momentarily disconcerted him: all his lines of communication were cut. By 1940, however, he had made contact with the Polish government then established in France. His method was a triumph of nerve: like all educated Poles, he was a first-class linguist, and spoke French perfectly and English fluently. And he had volunteered for work abroad in the *German Secret Service*!

A dozen times already he had made his way to England by devious routes. Each time he had carried back to Germany an assortment of information—some of it quite genuine, for it was important that his character should be sustained. But each time he came from Germany he brought far more information than he took back.

"Again, it all began very casually," Metcalfe was saying. "Wernski was telling me something about his agents. One of the most successful was a woman in Breslau, he said. She had been exploiting the method we talked about at your party: she was a fortune-teller, freely consulted by the female relatives of soldiers on service. These people are only too willing to talk, if they are cleverly led on. She seems to have been very clever. The amount of detail about troop movements she gathered was amazing—of course, it was of more immediate use to the Russians than to us, and we passed it on.

"This woman certainly seemed to know her job—was a good guesser, or however they do it. Wernski mentioned that she had built up a tip-top clientele—the wife of General Hoffman consulted her regularly, for example."

"I am beginning to see," said Lester.

* This name also is fictitious, naturally. This remark applies to many others mentioned in this record. Further, descriptive characteristics have occasionally been amended, to avoid recognition by the Gestapo. D.B.

"I thought you would. I emphasize that the affair is in the most elementary stages. I said nothing to Wernski. But it set me thinking. From the wife of General Hoffmann to Hitler is a big distance, but not an impossible one. I have begun to think about the business along these lines: supposing we were to—you young devil, you're not listening!"

He was quite right. Lester was already working out schemes of his own. The vast and intriguing possibilities of the situation had gripped his imagination.

"Just one minute, before we go any further," Colonel Metcalfe said firmly. "Let's be quite clear on this. If you go into it, you'll do it with your eyes open."

"I usually do."

"I admit that. Suppose—I only say *suppose*—you and this woman got into Hitler's confidence. After gaining it, you would then proceed to mislead him, badly. You could certainly make him lose a battle—maybe the war. That's good—but you realise what would happen to you?"

"I can imagine that my reception would not be especially cordial!"

"Hitler would revive all the tortures of the Middle Ages for you, plus a few modern ones of his own invention. I want to point out to you quite frankly that his last two or three astrologers have come to sticky ends—and they were doing their best to help him, not to hinder."

Lester smiled. "I'm reminded of the American gangster who kept a tame astrologer to tell him when the stars foretold a hopeful week for him. When the old fellow misread his planets, the gangster took him for a ride!"

Again there was complete silence in the room. Lester walked over to the window to survey the familiar scene. Now the clerks and typists were hurrying towards the Underground Station: it was as well to get home before the black-out began. The evening light on the park trees was especially beautiful.

"Well?" Metcalfe said, at long length.

"You know the answer."

"I thought I did. Now I'll tell you why I raised the idea today, at the risk of spoiling your leave. I've had a signal that Wernski is expected over here again tomorrow morning. If the job is to go through, he could begin to arrange a lot of preliminary details over there. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him to begin." Lester picked up his hat abruptly and walked towards the door.

"Where are you going?" Metcalfe asked.

"I want to catch the bookshops before they close. I must buy some books on astrology. They will make pleasant light reading while I am on leave!"*

CHAPTER TWO

THE greatest asset of the man who faces continuous danger is control. Nerves are his servants, not his master. He can dominate his own mind; his concentration is complete.

Yet Lester knew better than to concentrate on idleness. Instead, he let his thoughts drift, sometimes on casual matters, sometimes on Metcalfe's scheme. But he did not "follow it up"—he just casually played with the idea, usually ending by grinning at its humorous aspects, which were not hard to find. He lounged lazily on the wooded slopes of the Chiltern Hills. After weeks spent in occupied Europe, with a hundred men on his trail, it was a tonic to sense the freedom in the very air which he now breathed. Gradually there dawned a longing for company. He recognised that the instinctive demands of his body and mind for relaxation had been satisfied: he came back to town, and walked into Podger Cholmondeley's flat.

His friend had been christened Marmaduke, but the name had been forgotten very easily. His fate at school might easily have been foretold, for his chubby frame simply asked for a schoolboy designation like Fatty or Tubby: Podger was a shade less kind.

Here for certain Lester would continue to relax, if in a different fashion. Podger was completely irresponsible, it seemed: his brightest ideas were always failures, and he was often in trouble. Accidents seemed attracted to him whenever they wanted to happen. True, as Lester had often pointed out, they could scarcely miss him.

* Before plunging into the record, I should perhaps emphasise a point made in my accounts of Lester's previous cases—that it is difficult, if not impossible, to set them down in conventional form, with a dramatic surprise climax and dénouement in the last chapter. Indeed, I have already revealed the potential climax! Even if the story loses in suspense, however, it should gain in interest if I record in straight-forward fashion *how* Lester attempted to carry out his mission, based upon his own report. D.B.

Yet with all his follies, Podger was good company. Nor was he a fool, for he was a very clever and experienced air pilot, at present in the employ of Ferry Command. He and Lester began a cheerful round of theatres and parties. Podger's only disappointment was his friend's refusal to talk about himself.

"But I mean to say, old boy, I shan't tell anybody," Podger insisted, for the tenth time. "I believe you've got something on the go now."

"As a matter of fact, I have," said Lester, in a stage whisper—quite unnecessary, as they were alone in the flat. "I'm going to Rome to bump off Mussolini."

"What? I say, that's a grand idea! Couldn't I fly you over and drop you by parachute? And, I say, why not put somebody in Musso's place? I read a book once—I say, I'll take Musso's place, if you like. Then I could order the Italian army to go the wrong way."

"Do you speak Italian?"

"No, but I could learn. And I remember a bit of Latin: *Arma virumque cano, hic, hæc, hoc, donner und blitzen*—oh, no, that last bit wasn't Latin—I slipped into Spanish."

"You're a good flyer, Podger, but I can't quite see you as a dictator. Now your Aunt Matilda is another proposition. She would give orders to the German army as well as the Italian."

"But, my dear Tiger, my Aunt Matilda couldn't take Musso's place. I mean to say, she doesn't shave—how could she get that black chin of his?"

The telephone bell rang, and Podger answered, calling Lester over to take it.

"Right, I'll come round. Yes, right away."

"Oh, I say, old boy——"

"Sorry, Podger, I've just got to see a man about a job. While I'm gone, you might be working out your scheme for the impersonation of Mussolini."

"Good—righto, I will," Podger beamed.

The telephone call was from Colonel Metcalfe; Lester walked round to his private flat, less than half a mile away.

"Well, have you thought over that astrologer idea?" Metcalfe asked.

"No."

"What? Why, I——"

"You know damned well that I made up my mind on the spot,"

Lester grinned. "I'm open to bet that by this time you've got the whole thing fixed up."

"Well, true, I had arranged one or two preliminary details," Metcalfe confessed.

"I thought as much."

"But I warn you again—it's a very risky business."

"Mine usually is."

"Yes, but this is different. It is more dangerous if you win than if you lose."

"We can cut all that out. What did Wernski have to say?"

"He was delighted, of course. This fortune-teller of his has been pulling ideas out of Germans: Wernski is more than pleased at the idea of her pumping ideas into them. But she can't do it by herself—she doesn't know enough of the broad pattern of things. She needs a military expert near at hand."

"Of course—that's understood. You'll have to give me all the dope before I leave."

"Yes. We'll get the Russians in on this, too. They may be even more vitally affected than we are. Hullo——" he broke off at the sound of the door bell.

"Who's that?"

"One of the preliminary details, I expect," Metcalfe smiled.

A man was shown in: a rather ordinary man—he might have been a managing clerk to a firm of City solicitors. Metcalfe greeted him warmly—had obviously met him before.

"Lester, I want you to meet Mr. Newton—Captain Lester," he said. "I should add that Mr. Newton is the tame astrologer to the *Sunday Press*—he appears there under the name of Stellino."

Now Metcalfe's "preliminary detail" was quite clear—and was typical of the thoroughness which characterised the preparation of the enterprises he controlled. Stellino was obviously designated to be Lester's tutor in the lore of astrology: a living guide is far more valuable than any number of books.

How much had Stellino been told? Very little, Lester guessed: Metcalfe had probably invented some highly-coloured story to fit the occasion: yet it could not be more fantastic than the truth.

"I shall be glad to do everything I can," Stellino said—his voice was high-pitched and rather unattractive. "Yet I'm not quite certain that I'm the man you need."

"Why not?" Metcalfe asked, in some surprise.

"Well—this is very confidential, but I'm a fake!"

"Aren't all astrologers fakes?"

"Well, no. At least, some of them believe that they are genuine, but I dropped into the job by accident. I was sports columnist on the *Press*, and our astrologer fell sick. His column had to be kept going, for it's one of the most important in the paper. The language was easy to pick up, of course, from Stellino's previous write-ups. And I was lucky—an unusual proportion of my first batch of 'prophecies' came off—and Stellino had recently been rather unlucky. So the editor insisted that I should keep on the job—and I was glad to have it, for the pay was twice as high as that of the sports columnist."

"Gosh! And that's how our lives are guided!" Metcalfe ejaculated. "Millions of people read Stellino every week, and don't know that they are being directed by a sporting reporter!"

"By the way, what happened to the original Stellino?" Lester asked.

"Well, the editor had to let him work off his contract, of course—the name was the paper's copyright, fortunately. At first they gave him the sports column to do, but he made a hopeless hash of that—sporting stars are much more difficult to understand than ordinary stars. Last time I heard of him, he was drinking himself to death. Funny, but in the last column he wrote, he prophesied misfortune to himself—it was about the only one of his shots to come off. Well, as I say, I'll do what I can. I don't know what Captain Lester wants to do, but I can teach him the jargon. But if he's going to do anything practical, he ought to have some more advanced stuff than I can give him. Some of these people, like Naylor and Petulengo and Lindo, they do really believe in what they put down."

Lester appreciated Newton's frankness and agreed with his point of view. The ground work was important and must be learned, but much more was essential. The newspaper astrologer differs very considerably from the public practitioner: the latter depends very largely on his own personality, the former not at all: Newton was completely unimpressive. A fortune-teller rather than an astrologer would be necessary in the later stages of Lester's tuition, it seemed to him.

"Is there anything in the star business, Mr. Newton?"

"I doubt it. For my job, I need a very good information service—the paper provides that: a sound backing of knowledge of international affairs—I was once on the staff of a famous political review: and a lot of luck. Readers are very trusting people. If I bring off

one shot in four, they forgive me the other three. And, of course, a lot of my language is so ambiguous that it could mean anything."

"Yes, I noticed that!" They all laughed. "Well, where do I begin?"

"Here's the general idea behind astrology—there's nothing new about it, of course. It is one of the oldest sciences there is—was studied when first men tilled the ground and needed to know when to plant their seed. It was the forerunner of astronomy—in fact, you might say that astronomy is astrology carried to extreme lengths of efficiency but with all the magical bunk left out. But in those early times there was no distinguishing between what was magical and what was not."

"Something like alchemy and chemistry, I suppose."

"Exactly. The greatest astrologers—and astronomers—of old were the Chaldeans, the Magi as they were called. It was Magi who were the Wise Men of the East who worshipped the Christchild—and were led to His birthplace by following a star!"

Lester whistled. He hadn't expected the Bible to come into this. "Weren't the Ancient Egyptians in it, too?"

"Yes, like the Indians, Babylonians, the Maya people—and the folk of Lost Atlantis for all I know. The Greeks were keener on the purely mathematical side, and in their hands it became the science we know today, Ptolemy's system lasting till Copernicus supplanted it—and Copernicus got his Central Sun idea from another ancient Greek. Even Newton dabbled in astrology, and he was scientist enough for any man."

"But modern astronomers don't, surely?"

"No—they don't. If you want to make an astronomer really angry, you only have to speak of him as an astrologer, that's all. I think that Naylor gives the best definition—I'll lend you some of his books: I mugged up most of my stuff from him. He says: 'Present-day astrology is the study of the as yet inexplicable relationship and synchronisation which can be proved to exist between celestial phenomena on the one hand and terrestrial life on the other.'"

"I see. Mathematics rather than magic."

"Yes, that's the basis. Of course, some practitioners stray far away from this basis. They try to pretend that astrology is a definite science; and, of course, it isn't."

"Mind you, we must be careful how we sneer at the real astrologer. He will be the first to say that his profession has been damned by quacks. The moon influences tides. Why should it

not influence other physical features ? And if the moon, why not other heavenly bodies ? Many British farmers believe that seeds sown when the moon is growing have a better chance of germination. Beliefs like this may have been the first basis of astrology. They were founded on actual observation. A farmer noticed that seeds planted in the moon's rise did better than those planted in its fall. Others confirmed this from their own experience. Thus it grew into a belief. There's nothing abnormal about this—it's the way in which most of our knowledge grew. You go to a doctor with a fever, and he gives you quinine. He knows exactly what the quinine does, and why it is effective. A doctor a thousand years ago would also have given you quinine, if he had any. He did not know *how* it did its work, but he did know from a long process of trial and error that it was the best drug for certain fevers. Even medicine isn't right out of the trial-and-error era : astrology is only in the first stages.

" So astrologers, by keeping records, believe that events are influenced by the heavenly bodies—especially the sun, moon and planets. Thus, if they can get the date, place and hour of your birth, they know which of these bodies was in the ascendant at that time. By looking up their records and those of other astrologers, they find that people born under similar configurations of the planets have certain common characteristics, so they believe that you are likely to share these. Similarly, they believe that the ascendant bodies on a particular day influence the events of the day."

" So it implies fatalism ? "

" No. It used to do so, generations ago, but now it is recognised as no more than an influence. ' The stars incline, they do not compel.' There's no reason why you should not ' beat your horoscope.' Let me put it this way. A countryman will tell you that it is likely to rain, because the wind is blowing from a certain direction. The probabilities are that it *will* rain—but that's no reason why you shouldn't go out—it's just a warning to take a mac or an umbrella. Similarly, an astrologer will warn you that your stars reveal that next week you pass into a period of danger. That doesn't mean that you are going to be killed by a ' bus, but that you should take especial care during the period."

" I see. You mentioned horoscopes—talk about them."

" I'll leave them for a bit. First I must tell you about the ephemeris—"

" The what ? "

"An ephemeris—a set of tables of planetary positions in relation to the earth for each day of the year. From this you work out your horoscope. You draw out a circle and divide it into twelve compartments, like sections of an orange. You've seen one of these, dotted with weird hieroglyphics?"

"Yes."

"They are only conventional signs to represent the sun, moon and planets."

"I suppose they are just a dodge to impress the clients."

"No, there is more to it than that. They were compact symbols, like those used in chemistry and mathematics——"

"Or in map reading?" Lester suggested.

"Yes, a sort of highly technical shorthand. In fact, the signs are used in modern astronomy—you will find them, for example, in *Whitaker's Almanack*, and that surely is matter-of-fact enough. Besides, they were international—what we call 'Mars' the Greeks called 'Ares' and the Chaldeans had some outlandish name for it, but everybody knew it was called after the god of war, so every astrologer knew what was meant on a chart when he saw a diagram of a spear and shield, so ♂. Similarly, Venus was a goddess, so her sign, a hand mirror, was also clear enough: ♀."

"I've seen those signs somewhere before," Lester interrupted.

"Probably on the cages in the Zoo, to indicate the sex of the occupants. Mars is male and Venus female. You see, these ancient signs really do have a practical use."

Lester smiled. "I have met people whom it would have improved to mark them with the appropriate symbol on their chests."

The astrologer grinned, then continued. "To return to our subject, these signs are marked in the appropriate compartments on the horoscope—each of them represents one of the signs of the Zodiac."

"Ah! I've often wondered what the hell is a Zodiac."

"The Zodiac is an imaginary belt round the earth."

"At school they called it the Equator——"

"That was an imaginary circle on the earth, midway between the poles. There is a corresponding circle in the stars midway between the North Pole of the sky and its South."

"The North Pole of the sky—you mean the Pole star."

"No—the north star is a little off the mark and circles round it, and there is no star at all near the South Pole. The circle between is the Celestial Equator——"

"Also imaginary?"

"Of course. But the Zodiac is a belt of stars running each side of the Ecliptic."

"The what?"

"The Ecliptic," Newton repeated patiently. "I'm sorry to be so technical, but if you are to pose as an astrologer you must know the patter. These terms are useful in real astronomy, but they are also part of the fortune-teller's stock-in-trade. The Ecliptic is the path of the sun among the stars. The belt of stars on each side of it is the Zodiac, and that is the only part of the sky where the planets are ever found. It includes twelve constellations—star-groupings—hence the twelve divisions of the horoscope. You must know them, English names and high-faluting Latin names as well."

Lester sighed. "What are they?"

"I'll give you a list of the Latin terms to memorise, but meantime this verse may help:

'The Ram, the Bull, the Heavenly Twins
And next the Crab, the Lion shines,
The Virgin and the Scales;
The Scorpion, Archer, and Sea-goat
The Man who pours the water out
The Fish with glittering tails.'

"Good heavens," said Lester faintly. "What wretched hack composed that doggerel? It isn't grammar, and it doesn't rhyme, much less scan."

Newton grinned. "You'd never guess—Dr. Watts, the famous hymn-writer."

"Oh! Pity he didn't stick to his hymns, then!"

"You'll see that almost all the names are those of animals, hence the name, the 'Zodiac' or 'little zoo.' One is mythical, of course."

"What? A virgin?"

Newton grinned again. "No, the sea-goat: animal head and body and fishy tail. By the way, the signs for the different groups are more impressive; you should always display them. Here they are:

Aries ♈	Leo ♌	Sagittarius ♐
Taurus ♉	Virgo ♍	Capricorn ♐
Gemini ♊	Libra ♎	Aquarius ♒
Cancer ♋	Scorpio ♏	Pisces ♓

"I still don't see," Lester objected, "that these help to foretell the future."

"That is where the horoscope comes in. It shows the sky at the subject's hour of birth. Such and such a group is rising, another setting, another overhead—and each has its own peculiar influence on his character and destiny. This, naturally, is where astronomer and astrologer part company."

"I think I see the idea," said Lester thoughtfully.

"We haven't finished yet. The horoscope also shows the position of the planets and the sun and moon, and each has its influence too. Then each of these is affected according to the constellation it is in. And each is affected by its angular relation with the others, whether it is intrine, bi-sextile, or the rest. You have to know all that, too."

"I think," Lester commented, "I'd better stick to tea-leaves and pack of cards."

"Don't despair." Newton encouraged him. "It's no more difficult than, say, Contract Bridge—and not a patch on chess. But now you see what the horoscope is—a kind of shorthand chart of the sky at a given moment. Casting it is as matter-of-fact a job as drawing a map, only not so useful; it's in the interpretation that the scope for imagination comes in. Here, let's get a bit of paper and I'll show you how it works. Or, better still, let's make a date and get down to it seriously—it will take a long time. I'll give you a primary course, then pass you on to Naylor or somebody like that."

"Yes, I must certainly sit at the feet of practitioners who believe in their craft."

"I agree. I am only a charlatan, as I've admitted. Naylor would give you quite a different outlook. He'd begin with Lilly."

"Who?"

"William Lilly. He was an old-time astrologer who predicted the Great Plague and the Fire of London, years before they happened, so accurately that the authorities hauled him before the bar of the House of Commons to make quite sure that he hadn't started the fire himself, so as to make his prophecy come true!"

"Ah! There's an idea there."

"Yes, and get Naylor to talk to you about Nostradamus—I've got some good books about him. He gave some long-term prophecies which have come off—and some haven't, by the way."

"It sounds as if I've got a lot of work to do!" Lester commented, ruefully.

"You have," Newton grinned. "When can you begin?"

"Tomorrow."

"Right."

They fixed up the appointment and Lester returned to Podger's flat. He plunged into the books he had bought. Podger complained that Lester was very bad company. If he wanted to learn how to tell fortunes, Podger explained, there was always available Aunt Matilda, who did it by tea-leaves or by cards.

Next day his tuition began. It was very difficult and complicated, and Lester gained a new respect for the serious students of astrology. There might be a lot of fake in the work ; or, at best, a lot of uncertainty and lack of knowledge, but at least they worked mighty hard if they did their job properly. Nor were his tutors confined to Sunday newspaper astrologers, who do not necessarily include all the best of their company. One or two of them were rather concerned at the idea of passing on their hard-earned skill to an obvious amateur, but, when given a hint of the underlying purpose, they reacted with proper patriotism.

Day after day Lester toiled, coached by a series of tutors. Nor did he halt at astrology. Professional fortune-tellers were pressed into service ; a well-known hypnotist gave a serious outline of his technique, with a practical demonstration. Lester had always been noted for the thoroughness of his preparations, but never previously had he spent so much time on preliminaries. He had no hope of competing with professional rivals : his task was to get to know a little about a wide range of subjects. This knowledge, added to his quick wit, should serve him well whatever situation should arise.

Never had Lester's life been so crowded. At one period of his career he had been an actor : now he put himself under the tuition of an old friend who had long specialised in parts suggesting mystery and the supernatural—he was in his day a famous Svengali. Day by day he coached Lester in the suggestion of mysterious powers : he was a clever man, and realised that the dramatic actions of the stage would appear over-exaggerated in a drawing room. Every word and gesture was carefully toned down.

Lester prepared for the physical part of his impersonation. He allowed his hair to grow : it was fairly docile, and would lie down flat when he wished to move about without attracting attention, but ruffled at a touch into a most artistic mass. A medical specialist examined his eyes, and provided a wash which produced surprising results : ten minutes after its application Lester's eyes were,

amazingly bright—so flashing as to be startling in their suggestion of penetrating power.

The time came when Lester felt himself sufficiently advanced to essay a try-out. It was easily arranged. A lady friend of Metcalfe's, a woman of common sense, undertook to provide a drawing room of suitable "subjects" for an amateur's first effort: Lester's anxiety was to find how his personality went over, rather than to achieve success as a prophet.

It was a fairly stiff test. The company included not only a dozen solid middle-class women, mostly intent on voluntary war work, all knitting furiously as they talked: there was a colonel who bore the badge of a famous regiment: a fighter-pilot on leave, and one or two men holding responsible positions in business life. The test was a good one, but severe. This was no question of fooling a suburban housewife. If Lester could impress these people with his "powers," then he had every right to be satisfied with his progress.

He did, and he was! At the right moment the hostess announced her "lion" of the afternoon—she had persuaded Mr. Sventoni to come along. Mr. Sventoni was an occultist—oh, all the rage in America, my dears. Tells you such things—and what a personality!

Lester's entrance was a sensation. He said afterwards that he may have applied an over-dose of the eye lotion. He wore a black blazer over brightly coloured corduroys: his hair waved freely in the breeze through the open window: and his eyes stared wildly ahead.

Immediately he sensed the potential opposition. Most of the women were mentally prepared to believe in him: the men were hostile—his very make-up offended their fastidious and every-day outlook: they flattered themselves that they were practical men.

Ignoring the stream of introductions his hostess prepared to make, Lester carried the war right into the enemy's camp. He halted in front of the colonel, who glared at him in undisguised contempt.

"Fate has been unkind," Lester whispered—and his voice had a thrilling quality in its softness, the result of long training by his actor friend. "Some men get the limelight, others do the hard work. Some get all the rewards, others none. Some are favourites, others are misunderstood. Others have reaped the prizes which you deserved. Your fortune should have been higher than it is, but for the jealousies of others. Even now I see them surrounding you."

The colonel's eyes were now staring as hard as Lester's. "My God, he's right!" he shouted. "How did he know?"

The answer would have been very simple. The colonel was obviously a disappointed man. His medal ribbons indicated his campaigns—but there was not a single award for valour or merit.

He was still spluttering in his excitement, but Lester had turned to the fighter pilot, and had noticed the strained eyes which contrasted so vividly with his youthful features and complexion.

"You must not tempt the Gremlins again," Lester whispered. "Sometimes they help, sometimes they torment. For half a year you must avoid them: then they will welcome you back to the blue. Half a year, my friend."

"But what does he mean, Ronnie?" cried a middle-aged woman, evidently the pilot's mother.

"I don't know how he knows, but he's right. I had a medical this morning—grounded for six months."

This was a lucky hit, and after it Lester could do no wrong. At the height of his success he withdrew abruptly, almost brusquely rejecting the pleadings of the women. His firmest friend and adherent was the misunderstood colonel.

Metcalfe received Lester that night with quiet satisfaction—he had already heard from his friend of "Sventoni's" outstanding success.

CHAPTER THREE

THE night was pitch black: not even a star was visible through the heavy clouds which completely obscured the sky. There was a slight swell on the sea inshore, a suggestion of worse conditions farther out. But the men who received Lester showed no signs of excitement: to them, apparently, this was no more than a routine trip.

There will be thousands of great stories to be told after the war is over. Not least in excitement will be those of a little group of amphibious specialists who have carried out hundreds of isolated operations. Young naval officers and hefty commandos, operating powerful motor boats, have established a unique reputation. R.A.F. crews, baling out over Belgium, have been sheltered by the great underground organisation which covered occupied Europe: a

motor boat keeps a rendezvous at an agreed spot, and a few hours later the men are back at their station. A German sentry peers into the darkness from the cliffs of France: a strong hand suddenly presses his mouth, another seizes his rifle: a few minutes later, still wondering what has happened, he is on board a motor boat, hurtling towards interrogation in England. Or a British spy has to be landed on enemy soil.

Except that this was a longer trip than usual, it followed the pattern of many previous ones. The little craft moved gently down the Thames creek, then at speed into the estuary. The white horses multiplied, but the craft was very seaworthy.

Lester sat in the little cabin. He had scarcely exchanged a dozen words with the naval lieutenant who was in charge of the enterprise. Yet he had full confidence in him; the Navy always manages to inspire confidence—therein lies no small part of its strength.

The hours passed: a young man in commando uniform came into the cabin and produced sandwiches and the thermos flask full of coffee.

"Better fill up while you can, sir," he grinned-cheerfully.

An hour later Lester was summoned on deck. The boat was moving forward very gently, using only an auxiliary engine—or was it a set of batteries? The chug of the motor was faint and delicate, unlikely to be heard on shore.

"We're very near land now" the naval lieutenant said. "But I've got to confirm that we're at exactly the right spot. That's mighty important—for you!"

Lester agreed. It would be very unpleasant to be dumped down, a stranger in enemy country. Not that he was unprepared. His German passport was in perfect order: he carried a ration book and all other impedimenta of war time.

"This is the very hell of a coast," the lieutenant went on. "No distinguishing features at all."

The sea was now calmer, but there were sounds of breakers ahead. Keen eyes peered forward into the darkness.

"Looks like a breakwater fifty yards to starboard," the man at the bows called out, clearly but softly.

"Right, then I know where I am—we're about two miles out."

He gave the necessary orders: the boat turned, running parallel with the coast. Now the vigil was even more anxious.

"We've got to get exactly in the right line, or we shan't see the signal," the lieutenant exclaimed. "Ah, there it is!"

For just a fraction of a second a pale blue light had flashed on shore. Now the boat edged closer. As soon as it had passed through the breakers, two commandos leapt overboard. Theirs was the dangerous task—to reconnoitre ahead ; to ensure that the rendezvous was kept : and to eliminate any enemy opposition which might be encountered.

There was none. The operation, like many another of its kind, was perfectly planned. A slight splashing indicated the return of one of the patrols.

" All O.K.," he whispered.

" Good luck," said the lieutenant, offering his hand.

Lester dropped from the gunwale on to the back of the hefty commando, who carried him ashore without so much as wetting his boots. Then the soldier led the way across the beach : here, in a fold between diminutive sand dunes his colleague awaited him. His eyes now accustomed to the darkness, Lester perceived another figure by the soldier's side.

" Right. You're all right now ? We'll get back—no souvenirs for us this time. Goodbye, sir—and good luck."

" Come with me," said the man in the darkness.

Without a word Lester followed. His guide was evidently local, for he took a cross-country route without hesitation, skirting the little dykes which divided the cultivated fields. Not half a dozen times did they cross a road. Then the guide went forward first, to ensure that it was deserted.

The blackness seemed more intense than before : that eerie hour before dawn, Lester mused. His guide appeared to be anxious about the time, for he kept up a remarkable pace considering the darkness. Then buildings loomed up ahead—the faintest silhouette against the first suggestive signs of dawn.

The buildings assumed the familiar pattern of a Dutch farmhouse and its barns, neat and tidy even under war conditions. In the yard a four-wheeled cart was standing, loaded with vegetables : two powerful Flanders horses were already harnessed to its single shaft.

" Your journey into Rotterdam will not be comfortable," the guide said. " But we cannot help it—you understand ? "

" Of course ! " Lester pressed the man's hand. Strange, he mused : he had entrusted his life into the keeping of a man whose face he never saw !

— He crawled into the place indicated. A space had been kept free

at the front of the wagon : a rough rug lined the floor. Now someone pulled over him a length of light, slotted timber, not unlike the front of a chicken house. In turn, cabbages were piled on top of this. It was an excellent hiding place. Lester was cramped, but could turn occasionally as he lay on the floor of the cart : and he could breathe easily.

A sudden call to the horses, a jerk, and they were off. Once on the hard road, the driver whipped up his horses into a clumsy trot : the cart bumped noisily along the hard road, whose sets had been badly warped by the usage of war. In his coop Lester was decidedly uncomfortable, but quite happy : he had reason to be confident in the organisation which had charge of the first phase of his mission : it was functioning perfectly.

True, he was rather puzzled as to why such an elaborate method of concealment should be necessary. His papers were in perfect order : there seemed to be no reason why he should not travel openly. Yet he trusted the people on the spot—this was not the first time he had been in the hands of underground organisations which were doing such magnificent work in occupied Europe and they had never let him down.

His guide had been correct in warning him that his journey would not be comfortable : he lay at full length on the floor of the cart, inside the protecting coop of laths : the odour of the cabbages was unpleasant. However, this could only be the first stage of his journey.

It was now full daylight. The cart was still bumping over the uneven surface of the road. Suddenly Lester heard a shout of command. The cart pulled up hurriedly, the horses slithering helplessly for a couple of yards. Sharp voices were heard. Lester wriggled into a position of vantage : through a wide crack in the front of the cart, close by the driver's legs, he was able to see what was happening. The atmosphere seemed to chill : the driver had dismounted and was talking to a Dutch policeman. And in the background stood an armed German soldier !

It was significant that Lester did not consider his own personal danger, but the wrecking of his mission. It would be intolerable if he were to fail when he had scarcely begun. Yet he drew some confidence from the easy bearing of his driver.

"What's wrong ?" the latter demanded.

"General search," said the Dutch policeman. "A British boat touched on the coast last night—a German sentry was killed. A

British spy may have been landed—or a Dutch spy. So we are searching for him."

"Well, you don't expect to find him in a load of cabbages, do you?"

"We must search everywhere—those are the orders."

"What do you want to do—empty my cart?"

"No. That isn't necessary."

With the German soldier watching the proceedings carefully, the Dutch policeman climbed on to the cart. (It is a typical German device, to force local authorities to carry out unpleasant tasks.) Now Lester saw what the method of search was to be. It will be familiar to those of my readers who have travelled abroad. While they passed through the customs at a frontier station, they will have noticed that not even the engine escapes attention. A customs officer examines the lunch baskets of the driver and fireman: then he climbs on to the tender, for something may be hidden among the coal—alcoholic liquors, especially. He cannot unload the coal, so he operates with a long iron rod, like an outsize lever. This he plunges over and over again deep into the coal. If any bottles were hidden, his iron prong should certainly find them.

It was one of these implements which the Dutch policeman proposed to employ—his iron bar was at least five feet long. Beginning from the tail of the cart, he plunged it into the load of vegetables. His progress was slow, for each thrust impaled two or three cabbages.

Instinctively, Lester pressed himself forward, hard against the front of the cart. The policeman seemed to be doing his job thoroughly and vigorously struck the bottom of the cart. It would crash through the protective coop with ease. Lester steeled himself for a moment of agony. The bar might strike him a painful blow, but he must utter no sound.

He stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth—not only to muffle any involuntary cry, but to ensure that he did not bite his tongue. Now the plunges of the iron lever were very close. As each one was completed the policeman raked about, twisting and turning the rod. Its next descent would be dangerously near: the following one—

Despite his control, there was a sweat on Lester's brow—increased rather than diminished when he heard the policeman call out: "There's nothing here, that's certain."

The German soldier evidently agreed; the driver climbed back to his box and whipped up his horses. Lester relaxed on his uncomfortable planks, almost exhausted. There is no condition

more wearing than that of preparation for an emergency which at the last moment fails to materialise.

The horses trotted steadily along the straight, flat road. Lester longed for a halt, but appreciated the driver's difficulty—the German soldier and Dutch policeman would be able to see the cart at a great distance. Now, however, it passed through a village. Once clear and well away from the houses, the driver halted and descended from his box.

"You are all right?" he asked, but his tone was casual and unperturbed, Lester noticed.

"Yes, quite all right. That policeman missed me by a foot."

"Yes, he is clever with that iron bar. He always fools the Germans."

"What?" Lester cried.

"Of course, he is with us," the driver continued, calmly. "It was he who warned us that a German sentry had been killed, and that a strict search was being made. Little happens in Holland of which we do not hear. Well, we'll get on."

Lester lay back, his confidence completely restored. This was indeed a thorough organisation, and he could safely entrust himself to its keeping.

Half an hour passed. Now the cart was rattling over the cobbled streets of a town. A sudden turn, and it halted. Lester, through his spy hole, saw that they had entered a warehouse—evidently this was their destination.

The driver began to unload the cabbages, flinging them into huge baskets which stood on a raised platform alongside the cart. Another man appeared to be moving the baskets as fast as they were filled.

"Well, that's the lot," the driver announced at length. "I'll come into the office in a minute to get my docket signed."

It was a long minute. Then Lester heard a whisper: "All clear now!" and the lid of the lattice coop was thrown open. He staggered to his feet, poising himself uneasily after his long spell in such cramped quarters. The driver lent a willing hand as he scrambled from the cart: then led the way across the shed.

One small office stood away from the rest. The driver entered without knocking: the office was empty.

"Stay here," the driver said. "You are quite safe. I have to get back. Goodbye, my friend, and good luck."

"Goodbye, and a thousand thanks!"

"No thanks. I do little compared with you. Ours is a common cause. We will meet again, after victory."

The casual way in which the man accepted terrible risks was inspiring, Lester thought—ignoring the fact that he himself ran even more dangerous risks. No one can encounter unselfish service without a thrill. Sometimes we are appalled at the selfishness of so many people who are concerned only with their personal advantage: yet such thoughts can be countered by others—the knowledge that hundreds of thousands of people are willing to do so much without any thought of gain.

"Good morning, Captain Lester!"

Lester turned abruptly. A door had opened behind him, and someone stood there—an elderly man, with a short white beard: he had a jolly face, as of one who in less desperate times knew how to live.

"I am sorry that you had such an uncomfortable journey. Apparently something went wrong as the landing party was getting away, so I had to take urgent precautions."

"Your organisation is excellent, mynheer," said Lester: he did not ask the elderly man's name.

"Thank you. One does what one can. The next stage of your journey will not be exactly pleasant, but at least you will not be cramped. You would like to leave at once?"

"I am in your hands."

"The sooner you are clear of Rotterdam, the better. Everything is arranged. A canal runs by the back of this warehouse: there are two barges moored by the wharf. The second is yours—you cannot mistake it, for it bears the name *Utrecht Stadt*. Just outside this door is a large sack: you will pick it up and carry it into the hold of the barge—and you will stay there."

Again Lester appreciated the brains behind the organisation: simplicity is the essence of cleverness in espionage. A man carrying a sack is a common sight on a canal wharf.

The elderly man held out his hand.

"I think you will find that everything is planned," he said. "Goodbye, and good luck."

Lester shook the proffered hand firmly, murmured his thanks, and passed out through the door. Here was the promised sack, full and fairly heavy, so that Lester stooped slightly as he shouldered it—another realistic detail. He stepped on board the barge. Some of the planks which normally covered the hold had been removed: through the gap he saw an iron ladder descending into the depths of

the barge. He climbed down cautiously : the barge was apparently deserted. Lester walked along the hold into its darkest corner, and sat down on his sack. This was always the hardest part of an assignment—waiting.

Yet the timing of the underground organisation was evidently as keen as its planning. Before half an hour had passed, Lester heard footsteps above him : the missing planks were flung across the hold and fastened in place. A gentle rumble indicated that the low-powered engines of the barge had been started up. There were signs of movement.

Lester sat still for an hour or more. Then, cautiously, he began to examine his new abode, with the aid of a torch. The hold was completely empty—was evidently used for one-way traffic. Grey deposits about its floor suggested that it was used for conveying chemicals—potash, Lester hazarded a guess. The odour was not very pleasant.

He looked into the sack he had brought on board. At its mouth was a small packet of food : for the rest, the sack was filled with blankets. Yes, the Dutch organisation had an eye for detail.

He ate sparingly—for he had no idea how long the food was supposed to last. Not that he was especially anxious—the Dutch above all people in Europe appreciate that a man must eat for life and energy.

The hours passed slowly. He spread out the blankets and lay down. A spy learns to conserve his rest like a camel does water. He may miss sleep for many nights : he makes up for its lack when he can. The gentle movement of the barge was soothing.

A sudden noise : planks were being moved. Then a voice—that of a woman.

" Mynheer Englishman, you can come up now. It is dark."

Lester climbed up the iron ladder. Someone took his arm and led him aft to the tiny cabin which was the living room of the barge's crew. In its light his companion was revealed, a hefty Dutchwoman, the wife of the master of the barge.

" My husband will join you," she said. " I will take his place at the wheel. But start eating."

Wartime restrictions or no, he was evidently not intended to starve. An appetising and solid meal was laid out on the table ; even as he attacked it, his host joined him. The cabin was small, and the bargee was even larger than his wife. But his greeting was cordial.

"Eat, my friend," said the Dutchman. "Then after a rest, take some exercise on deck. Wash and shave when you will. Then, live like the mouse, sleeping by day and walking by night. There is no danger like that."

"There is no search at the frontier?"

"Only if the Germans are nervous, or suspicious. We shall have no trouble. You are the fifth passenger I have carried like this. I have carried over thirty the other way. Some of them were your airmen who had been shot down: others were young men who wanted to get to Britain to fight."

The meal over, Lester walked gently about the deck of the great barge, chugging stolidly against the forceful current of the Rhine. Certainly patience would be needed, for this must be a leisurely journey.

Occasionally the barge was tied up for a few hours, while the bargee and his wife rested, or replenished their supplies. Actually, they worked astonishingly long hours: the Germans offered a special bonus for rapid journeys—and this suited their present assignment admirably.

Days and nights passed: bright in the moonlight Lester saw the tall spires of Cologne Cathedral, and did not envy the residents of the ruined city: then the university town of Bonn and, almost opposite, the Seven Mountains. Strange that so lovely a land should breed such a warlike folk. No wonder that British people are confused. They recall happy holidays they spent in the Reich, and the pleasant Germans they met there: it is difficult to appreciate the effects of the herd instinct which dominates Germany, and changes kindly individuals into a cruel, vicious mob. A mob is no more than a collection of individuals, but it never has the character of its components. It is like a chemical composition. Saltpetre, sulphur and charcoal are harmless chemicals, often beneficial in their applied effects: but, united, they form gunpowder.

Lester kept his mind alert by running over continuously his unusual and intensive studies of the past few weeks. Colonel Metcalfe's plans had been very thorough: probably no astrologer had received a more concentrated training than Lester.

The left bank of the river was now encased in black shadows, as the wooded mountains of the Alsatian Vosges approached its margin. The barge was laid up for a few hours: from the sounds of movement, both the bargee and his wife went ashore. Then the

rhythmic motion re-commenced. At the usual hour Lester was summoned to his evening meal.

"Sorry we had to halt," the Dutchman explained. "I didn't want to run into Strasbourg before dark."

"Why not?"

"A little girl waved her handkerchief to me a few miles down river. That was a sign—we must be on the alert!"

CHAPTER FOUR

STRASBOURG! Now Lester prepared for action: the first stage of his adventure was accomplished. So far he had been in the hands of others: now, very soon, he must fend for himself. His passport, perfectly forged, showed him to be Henrik Pfiffstein, merchant, of 11 Place des Vosges, Strasbourg. It might need replacement later.

It was well after dark when the barge slid gently to its moorings at Kehl, the river port of Strasbourg, four miles from the city. Lester remained in the hold, but heard the shouting of the man on shore who handled the ropes. Evidently he came aboard, for Lester heard him talking to the bargee: maybe the little cabin hid some potent Dutch liquor.

A few minutes later the woman called him. On the deck the dockside man stood with the Dutch bargee.

"Welcome, Captain Lester," the man whispered—in *German*. "You have had a good journey?"

"Excellent." Lester understood the precautionary use of German, since the Germans had re-annexed Alsace.

"Good. Let us go."

Lester turned to offer his thanks to the bargee and his wife, but they dismissed them good-humouredly. When this war is over, the list of decorations for valour will exceed in interest even that of the battlefield.

Lester followed his new companion along the quay. On a concrete road stood a lorry.

"You can sit beside me," the stranger announced. "There was some excitement this afternoon, so I sent a warning down stream. But it has subsided—the Germans have got the man they were after."

"One of ours?"

"No, a common criminal—but they don't know that yet. I'm longing to have a look at you, Captain Lester."

"I suggest that you forget that name," Lester said, quietly.

"You are quite right, friend Pfiffstein. Or shall it be Henrik? Here is my house—I will park the lorry on this waste ground."

"What about my own house, by the way—the one named on my passport?"

"It was damaged in the little battle here in 1940. That is why we suggested the address. So, of course, you have taken refuge with a friend."

They passed inside the house: a woman greeted them in the darkened hall.

"This is Frau Mulheim, my sister-in-law," the man explained.

"She looks after me. But take off your hat and coat—I want to look at you."

Lester greeted Frau Mulheim, and hung up his coat. Mulheim grasped him eagerly by the arm, and led him to a back room. Here the lighting was normal. Mulheim stepped back, and surveyed his visitor: a light of amazement shone in his eyes.

"My God!" he whispered. "This is fantastic—incredible! Maria, come and look!"

The woman hurried into the room. Her surprise was even greater than that of her brother-in-law. Her mouth was wide open as she stared, apparently almost afraid.

Certainly few, if any, of Lester's friends would have recognised him. His dark brown hair had been dyed, and was now almost white: usually trimly kept, it was now inordinately long and uncontrollable. His normal healthy complexion had vanished, and his skin shone with a rather unhealthy pallor. His clothes were of black cloth, and of a very old-fashioned cut. Yet Mulheim stared at his eyes, flashing almost unnaturally brightly against such a background.

"Fantastic!" Mulheim repeated. "I had no idea that such miracles could be worked! His own brother could not tell you apart."

In spite of her greater surprise, the woman was first to recover her composure.

"Herr Pfiffstein must be hungry after his long journey," she suggested.

They ate—far more frugally than on the barge, Lester noted. Then, as the woman retired with the crockery, Mulheim again began

his expressions of amazement. But now Lester was anxious to get down to business. He knew so little—only the germ of the plan had been communicated to London. The rest had been left to local organisation and improvisation. For that matter, Lester knew nothing of Mulheim—had never heard of him until their encounter on the barge. He had to accept him on trust, but to date the underground organisation had been efficient and trustworthy.

"So, my friend, you find yourself in Alsace, among Alsatians."

The casual remark clarified Lester's ideas—this was not the same organisation which had undertaken the direction of his journey. Too many people in Britain accept the Alsatian situation over simply. A French province for two hundred years, seized by Germany in 1871, restored to France in 1918—all this is true enough. Yet, although a French province, the majority of its people are of German ethnic stock. This does not mean that they clamour for union with Germany—far from it. A lot happened in those two hundred years—the French Revolution, among other things, which was wildly welcomed in Alsace: it was in a house in Strasbourg where Rouget de l'Isle first sang the "Marseillaise." In those two hundred years, also, the Germans were Prussianised, and the Alsatians escaped this degrading process and detested its effects. The people who argue about good Germans and bad Germans can find useful background in Alsace and in Switzerland. Yet the high qualities of the Alsatians and Swiss of German descent only emphasise the size of our task in Germany proper.

Now although most Alsatians welcomed their release from German bondage in 1918, they appreciated that their cultural background differed from that of the French. A considerable movement developed in the province: its members demanded autonomy—a liberal share of self-government within the French Republic. This idea was stimulated rather than killed by the German annexation of Alsace after the French collapse in 1940. Immediately there began the Nazification of Alsace, hateful to the large majority of the citizens. Those of French origin and sympathies (and there were many in the south of the province) were promptly expelled into France: most of the rest set themselves to resist German pressure and to await the day when Alsace should be free to decide its own destiny.

A few minutes conversation revealed that Mulheim was a member of an Alsatian organisation pledged to evict the Germans, and working in close collaboration to this end with Britain and the Fighting

French. Of his anti-Nazi convictions there could be no doubt—Lester had never heard so violent a denunciation.

Quite satisfied, he led the conversation round to his own assignment.

"I suggest a halt of a few days in which you can acclimatise," Mulheim said. "You must get acclimatised to the Alsatian dialect—it is not pure German, by any means. My sister-in-law and I will talk to you continuously.

"I have already studied it—in London," Lester smiled, slipping into Alsatian German as he spoke.

It was now Mulheim's turn to be surprised at the thoroughness of British organisation.

"Why, you will be able to go about almost at once," he exclaimed a few moments later.

"That's good. I'd like to see Strasbourg again."

"Again?"

"Yes. This is my third visit—the last was in 1940."

"I can see that the whole plan can safely be speeded up. You go to bed. I will go out—I want to see a friend."

He returned in the middle of the following morning with his friend—a woman. She revealed herself as a hairdresser and carried some of the implements of her trade in a suitcase. Three hours later Lester looked at himself in a mirror. The wig she had made effectively covered his long white hair: he could safely walk the streets of Strasbourg.

"You are ready to begin work tomorrow, then? Or would you rather wait a few days to gain confidence?"

"I am quite confident. I have never been on any mission which was so perfectly organised."

"Very well. I will explain the plan to you."

"That's good. I'm full of curiosity. I got only the germ of the idea in London."

"Wait! I will telephone to make an appointment. It is safer—then you will not have to hang about in the waiting-room."

He returned ten minutes later. "I've fixed it for half-past three tomorrow."

"Good. And now tell me what 'it' means."

"Right, my friend."

They walked until the darkness fell. Lester's sense of excitement had been curiously dulled during his journey: other people had done all the work—so efficiently that the enormous risks were not

apparent. Now he would have to depend primarily upon his own resources for the second stage of the adventure.

Mulheim accompanied him the following afternoon until within a hundred yards of his destination. Lester steadied himself as he pressed the bell of the house. The next twenty minutes might be critical.

The door was opened by a small boy dressed in eastern costume—green silk shirt, baggy breeches in vermillion, sandals, and a fez. He salaamed obsequiously. Lester was not impressed—the first suggestion was of fake.

"The Master will see you soon," the boy whispered, as Lester gave his name—or, shall we say, *a* name.

Lester was alone in the waiting-room: it was dark and gloomy, with a restless and unpleasant atmosphere. A faint odour permeated the room—a rather objectionable sweet smell.

Now the boy was back again.

"The Master will see you!" He had evidently been trained to suggest mystery in his whisper, but was an inexperienced actor.

He opened a door, then pulled aside a curtain. Lester found himself in a larger room, even darker than the first. If it ever had windows, they had been blocked up with heavy curtains. A green lamp of small power hung over an ancient desk. Behind it hung a huge coloured chart, extravagantly marked with cabalistic signs. The faint odour was here more distinct.

The silence was absolute. Lester agreed that the effect, theatrical though it was, would be successful with the people of small intellect likely to consult a fortune-teller.

There was a temptation to explore the room, but he restrained himself. Probably he was being watched—it is a common device for a fortune-teller to take a preliminary glance at a client through a peep-hole. So Lester sat still in the chair, making only the slight signs of nervous tension which would be expected of a client suddenly confronted with such weird surroundings.

Very quietly curtains parted. The seer was about Lester's build. His costume was a long flowing robe of purple: his face had an unnatural pallor, and an unruly shock of white hair crowned his head. Most remarkable feature was his eyes, which glinted in an amazing sparkle with a suggestion of keen penetration.

Almost automatically Lester's hand strayed to his wig: it was in correct place. He had risen to his feet as the Master entered the

room. Now a gentle indication of the hand motioned him back. The Master seated himself behind the antique desk.

Lester braced himself to mental effort. "Study the man well and quickly," Mulheim had said, "for he is about to die!"

CHAPTER FIVE

ASTROLOGERS, like members of all other trades and professions, hold conferences. Indeed, the principal complaint of serious students is that they do not meet often enough. Since their science depends so largely upon recorded experience, the fullest and freest exchange of information is essential to progress.

Most of the conferences are national, but it is quite customary for "fraternal delegates" to be invited from other countries. In 1936, however, an international congress was held in Germany, at Düsseldorf, and for convenience sake the German Astrological Congress was held at the same time and place. It was ill-fortune for the man who called himself Professor Zodius, and who operated in Strasbourg, that he was selected by the French Astrological Society as one of its delegates to the International conference. Maybe he was so busy casting horoscopes for other people that he had no time to consult his own! Or is there any truth in the ancient belief that he who predicts the fate of others cannot foresee his own?

The international conference was amicable and successful. It sent the usual courtesy telegram to the ruler of the state in which it met, and was encouraged by a warm reply from Hitler: "To Secretary of 3rd International and 15th German Astrological Congress. Heartly thanks for your greetings. I send in return best wishes for your work. Adolf Hitler."

After the international astrologers had dispersed, the German group stayed on, and was joined by many others of their own race who had not been delegates at the wider meetings. They discussed astrology, true, but they also received lectures from officials of the Ministry of Propaganda. The course of the stars was to be swayed, if necessary, to suit the requirements of Dr. Goebbels.

A full description of the scene would be interesting,* but does not

* At a later date Lester was able to secure a lengthy account, which is now in my possession. D.B.

concern our present record. The point is that when the British, American, Italian and other delegates left Düsseldorf, Professor Zodius of Strasbourg stayed on. Recall that this was in 1936, when he was a French citizen. He sought to be unobtrusive when he attended the German conferences, but his personality was strong and his physical appearance striking. Of course, he was quite safe—he was among friends. But the Germans are not the only ones who understand the art of inserting one of their own agents in the ranks of their opponents. The Russians are especially good at it: nor are other countries ignorant of the practice: even the much-criticised British Secret Service has been known to employ it.

Thus it was reported by a roundabout route to the Deuxième Bureau in Paris that Professor Zodius of Strasbourg was not all that he seemed to be. For that matter, neither was the German woman astrologer from Breslau who noted that Zodius stayed on to the purely German meetings. At first she was scarcely suspicious—Zodius was an Alsatian and might consider himself culturally a German, entitled to attend the meetings of the astrologers of his own race. But when he also listened to the lectures in which all German astrologers were given a clear lead as to the type of "information" they should pass on to their clients, then she was suspicious: there was a *prima facie* case that Zodius was in German pay.

The Second Bureau in Paris—the organisation which covered all counter-spy activity—was intrigued at the news. The method was not new—more than once fortune-tellers have been used as spies. Their opportunities are wide: they are in touch with hundreds of emotional and neurotic people, who can keep nothing secret—can be easily handled by astute practitioners. The Germans now proposed an alternative method; apparently Zodius was not only to glean information from his clients, but was also to transmit ideas to people who are in a very receptive mood.

Experiment confirmed this opinion, as French men and women agents discreetly and at intervals consulted the oracle of Strasbourg. There was ample evidence to justify an arrest, but it was withheld by political action. France was anxious not to give Germany any cause for complaint, some people argued. Others, more astute, agreed that Zodius should be left at liberty, but for quite a different reason. It is good policy, when you have identified a spy, to leave him at large: he may lead you to others, or to traitors in your ranks. So it was arranged that Zodius should be watched.

He was a very clever man. In the months that followed, French

counter-spies became anxious—surely the man must send information back to Germany. But how? They guessed the answer, for a close watch on all ordinary methods of communication had failed. Yet how easy it would be for a travelling German agent to consult Professor Zodius, and to take back his collected news!

The position was thoroughly unsatisfactory when Zodius disappeared. This was in September, 1938, a few days before the fateful conference at Munich. He was thought to have crossed into Switzerland. The chief of the Second Bureau was furious. Evidently one of his agents had been clumsy, and Zodius had known he was being watched. This suspicion was confirmed when he did not re-appear in Strasbourg after the excitement of Munich had subsided; in fact, he did not return to his home until the Germans marched into Strasbourg in June, 1940—and by that time the Second Bureau had almost ceased to exist!

After the first shock of collapse, Frenchmen recovered. First, little groups, in different parts of the country, organised themselves to resist the German occupation. Gradually they were gathered together in liaison, and by the end of 1942, there existed a vast and widespread underground organisation. Its activities had no limit: it sabotaged German communications: it smuggled French volunteers—and British airmen—out of France: it carried out espionage in the Allied cause: and it set itself to undermine the morale of the occupying German troops.

One branch of the organisation flourished in Alsace. There the population came from three distinct stocks: German, from the thousands of families planted there between 1871 and 1918: French, from the original French stock of the southern part of the province and from those who had settled in Alsace since 1918; and Alsations—these latter the largest body. Most Alsations were with the French in their detestation of the Nazis, and we have already remarked that they were busily engaged in underground activity.

At the right moment the suggestion reached them from London the Professor Zodius would pay for the watching. Again suspicion was justified. Astute observation revealed that he was for practical purposes a Gestapo agent. It was seldom that harm came to his clients, but often to their relatives. No one will ever know the full damage caused by wagging tongues.

Zodius was able to take professional advantage of his unique position. After he had led on some uncomfortable woman to

babble about her brother, at an appropriate moment he would warn her dramatically of threatening danger. Next day the brother would be arrested by the Gestapo—and the sorrowing woman would confirm to her friends what a wonderful prophet he was. They, in their turn, would rush to this seer to find out if danger threatened their men, also engaged in illicit activity.

The final message from London arrived only just in time. Zodiuss had become very dangerous: despite all their precautions, the patriots could not prevent anxious people from consulting him. So he was duly tried—in his absence, of course. The evidence against him was clear enough: without any doubt he was a German agent. He was condemned to death, and a committee of three was appointed to carry out the sentence.

It was at this stage that orders arrived from London that the personality of Zodiuss was needed. The patriots were instructed to get all possible photographs and information about him. This was fairly easy, for a seer courts publicity. The photographs were smuggled first into Spain, then to Britain, by a woman who carried them between the layers of leather in the soles of her shoes. On their basis Lester had built up his physical personality before leaving London—very successfully, to judge by the astonishment of Mulheim.

Now he could study his quarry in person, as well as from the mass of notes which Mulheim and his friends had put together. He had prepared a suitable story. According to this, Henrik Pfiffstein's wife had been evacuated from Strasbourg early in the war, and, unlike most of the Alsatians of German stock, had not been repatriated. Pfiffstein had tried everything, but the Vichy authorities had been unable to trace her. Where mortals failed, could the stars assist?

(In passing, and to illustrate the thoroughness of the preparations, it may be remarked that there did exist a Henrik Pfiffstein, of 11, Place des Vosges, Strasbourg—but he was not using that name at present. What is more, his wife had been evacuated, and could not be traced in Vichy France—small wonder, since she had escaped into Spain and thence to England!)

So Lester sat opposite Professor Zodiuss. Evidently the astrologer was quite unaware of the suspicion he had aroused—there was no sign of concern or anxiety in his face. His position was so secure: if the stars let him down, his Gestapo friends would not.

"You need me?" Zodiuss said—almost whispered.

"Yes," Lester hesitated. He adopted the pose of a man rather nervous at his first visit to a fortune-teller.

Gently but cleverly Zodiuss drew the story out of him. It was evidently quite an ordinary one, bread and butter work to a seer in times of anxiety.

"Wait!" said Zodiuss, interrupting Lester in the middle of a sentence. "Let me look into the mirror!"

A pull of a cord, and a silk curtain slid away to reveal a large mirror. Its surface was an ever-changing maze of colours, evidently produced by a ring of lights hidden in the inside rim of the frame. Lester saw nothing but a medley of colour shades, but Zodiuss was staring hard.

"I do not like what I see," he announced. "I must consult the stars."

"Shall I wait?" Lester asked: at least Zodiuss was revealed as a fake: no serious astrologer fools about with mirrors and crystals.

"No. It will take time. Give me details of your wife—her place of birth, the date and the hour. All else you can about her. Then return at this time in two days from now."

The interview was over. As if invisibly summoned, the small boy appeared to usher Lester out—after a formal request for the Master's fee of five marks. It was cheap at the price, Lester chuckled as he walked along the street. He had made a practical study of Zodiuss' methods—had noticed the dramatic movements of his hands, the effective modulation of his voice, his skill in conversation, and his air of confidence. These points were most useful. What was more, Lester had an invitation from Zodiuss to come back again!

As he exulted at the way in which his mission was progressing, he was more than grateful for the thoroughness of the detailed preparations others had made. Presumably Zodiuss would consult the Gestapo, not the stars, and the German organisation would confirm Pfiffstein's story. If that had not been well based, at Lester's second visit he would probably have received a serious and warranted warning of danger—to himself!

However, after two days Zodiuss had no news for him. The astrologer poured out a stream of platitudes which sounded important but meant very little. Pfiffstein's wife was alive and well, he declared, but his interpretation of her horoscope was not yet complete. Lester was quite content. Another visit meant another opportunity for studying his man.

Nevertheless, he felt an inward excitement when he returned to Mulheim's house. As he knew from long experience, every minute spent in enemy territory is a strain: at a second's notice something may happen to betray the spy. He trusted Mulheim implicitly, but it was not impossible that the Germans had followed their usual custom and had planted agents inside the patriot organisation.

"I feel quite confident that I can take on the job," he said to Mulheim that night. "I think that we can speed it up. I should like the invitation from Breslau to arrive soon after I take over—I am much less likely to betray myself in Breslau than in Strasbourg, where I am known."

"You will not fail here," Mulheim assured him. "And Franzchen will help you."

"Franzchen? Who on earth is he?"

"Ah, perhaps I forgot to mention that—there are so many details. Franzchen is the receptionist for Zodius."

"What, that boy in the eastern costume?"

"Yes. He is with us, of course."

"What?"

"Yes. That was one reason why we were able to get so much information about Zodius."

"But—are you sure that it is safe to trust a boy with such secrets?"

"Franzchen is almost a man. He is very small, I know, but he is seventeen. And he is a patriot," Mulheim added.

Lester could only trust his companion's judgment. Certainly the lad would be an admirable aid—if he were also a good actor. His performance as a receptionist suggested the theatrical. The more he thought over it, the more Lester was disturbed.

However, it was far too late for him to take action, and in any case he could scarcely interfere in the organisation of the underground movement. He returned to his comment about the signal for the invitation from Breslau.

"You can get it over rapidly?" he asked.

"Easily. One of our men can cross into Switzerland tomorrow night. One of our friends there writes the news bulletins for a Swiss radio station. The signal agreed with London was the words 'quickly,' 'soon,' and 'at any time' in the same bulletin. He can easily work them in, quite naturally. So the signal should go to England the day after tomorrow. I do not know how long it will take London to instruct Breslau, or how long a letter from Breslau will take in getting here. Although Alsace is administered as part of

Germany, they still apply the censorship at the old frontier on the Rhine."

"I see."

The news was comforting. Lester had a good idea that the Pole, Wernski, had arranged a radio signal with Colonel Metcalfe, so that the woman astrologer in Breslau could be warned readily. But he said nothing to Mulheim. Even to a proved friend, a spy reveals only the bare essentials of a case.

"Today is Tuesday," Mulheim said. "Saturday is Zodius' busiest day, according to Franzchen. He never works on Sunday—refuses all clients—the seer must commune with his controls, or whatever his current dope is. Very well. We will arrange the ceremony for Saturday night. Then you will have a whole day to examine his apparatus and records."

"Good. You have fixed up the—er—ceremony?"

"Oh, yes. That was all settled before you arrived. In fact, Zodius owes you a debt of gratitude. But for you, he would have died weeks ago."

Lester used the intervening days intensively. He studied in detail the notes about Zodius: then, with the help of Mulheim and his sister-in-law acting as clients, he gave himself practice as a fortune-teller—using Alsatian German. Every day renewed his confidence. A spy's life is one long hazard, but it is always comforting to know that his supporting organisation is firm and capable.

Saturday was wet and miserable. "All the better," Mulheim commented. "There will be fewer people about."

The plan was simple enough. One of the three executioners telephoned to fix up an appointment with Zodius, and Franzchen arranged that it should be the last of the day. The man entered the seer's house: Mulheim and another man waited with Lester nearby. These were anxious moments—the conspirators did not wish to enter too early, lest Zodius should be behind with his appointments: on the other hand there was a risk of police challenge.

A chink of light through the door was their cue. Silently they slipped into the waiting-room. Franzchen pointed along a passage and Mulheim followed it cautiously: it led to Zodius' private room, whence he emerged to greet his clients.

Already the minute's dramatic wait was over. Zodius was seated behind his desk.

"You wish me to tell you something?" he began, in his low whisper.

"No. I wish to tell *you* something," said the visitor, casually. "That you have been condemned to death by the underground patriot organisation. No, do not move! It is useless to ring that bell, anyway—it is not working. Sit very still."

Zodius found himself facing an automatic: had he been in the mood for his usual observation of detail, he would have noticed that it was of German army regulation pattern, taken from an unfortunate soldier who had no further use for it.

Instinctively Zodius turned to his rear: there stood Mulheim, grimly armed. The third man now appeared in the doorway. The astrologer saw that he was completely trapped.

"This is absurd," he began, but his voice was unnaturally harsh and grating. "I have done nothing. I am an Alsatian, like you."

"You are a Gestapo agent, and you must die," Mulheim announced. "You have served Germany for years. Now you must pay the price."

A small flushed circle appeared in the pallid cheeks of Zodius. His tongue moved to moisten his lips. He stammered—for once his fluent tongue failed him.

"But why should you do this?" he burst out at last. "I have done no harm to you!"

"You have brought the Nazi scourge on Alsace."

"But to you, I said——"

"Yes, and to me. Four months ago you denounced a man to the Gestapo, on the basis of the vacuous babblings of one of your clients. When the man was arrested, a friend was with him. Both went to the firing squad—you remember the case, Professor Zodius? The second man was my brother. My name is Mulheim."

Zodius looked at him, shrinking back in fear.

"Now it is your turn to face the firing squad," Mulheim continued inexorably. "We cannot provide the customary eight rifles," he added, grimly, "but doubtless one automatic will be just as effective."

"But you are condemning yourselves," Zodius shouted, frantic with fear. "If I *am* a Gestapo agent—I deny it—but if I am, and you murder me, then they will track you down."

"No, they will not. Your body will not be found."

"But I shall be missed. Zodius is a personality is Strasbourg." His confidence was apparently returning, now that the first abrupt shock was over.

"You will not be missed—you will be dead. And Zodiuss will still be here."

"What?" The unhappy man ran his fingers frantically through his long hair, striving to understand.

Lester judged the moment ripe for his own entry. He passed through the curtains, and stood silently before the astrologer. But for the lack of robes, he might almost have been a mirrored reflection. Zodiuss stared incredibly.

"I am mad—or this is a dream!" he cried.

"Then you are mad," Mulheim went on unmercifully. "There is a cellar below this room. Your execution will be staged there. Will you walk down, or must we bind and carry you?"

"But it is madness—my body will be found!"

"No. It is an ancient device, I know, to bury a body under a cellar. But it is only found when it is missing—and Zodiuss will *not* be missing. Even if a body were found, it would not be recognised as yours. We have an ample supply of quicklime—for your face and head, anyway."

"Pity! Pity!"

"You had no pity for the dozens of men you sent to the gallows or the concentration camp. We have none for you. If you wish to pray to your stars, or to the devil you have worked for, do it now. You have exactly five minutes to live."

Convinced at last that there was no escape, the nerve of the condemned man failed. He emitted a harsh scream—only one, before firm hands closed about his mouth: in any case, the sound was deadened by the curtains which hung across all the walls.

The executioners had to carry him down to the cellar. His eyes were rolling in fear, like those of a madman. Lester remained in the room. His help was not needed.

The silencer on the automatic was evidently effective, for Lester heard no sound. Presently, however, came an occasional sharp click, as of a pick striking a stone.

Over an hour passed. Then Mulheim and his two companions returned.

"It is all over," he announced. "Here are his robes." Mulheim was quite calm, but the other two men showed signs of strain. "You have the house to yourself now. Goodnight, my friend, and all the luck of the stars be with you."

"Goodnight."

Now Lester was alone. Ten feet below him lay the body of the

dead man in its bed of quicklime. On the desk in front of him lay the astrologer's garish robes, as Mulheim had casually flung them.

A sound of movement in the adjacent room startled him. The curtains parted, and Franzchen stood there—a strange Franzchen, in ordinary street clothes.

"I have locked up, Master," he said, quietly. "I shall be here on Monday. Goodnight, Master."

CHAPTER SIX

LESTER stared at the curtains, still swinging gently after Franzchen's departure.

The drama of Zodius' death had been almost overwhelming. To patriots who have seen their brothers die, the execution of a traitor is no more than a matter of justice: to an outsider, whatever his trade, it is an ordeal. Lester's nerves were strong—obviously, or he would never have undertaken the mission: yet he could scarcely control his excitement as he sat alone in the dead man's chair, maybe facing the greatest thrills and perils of his adventurous career.

Had he needed a calming influence, it would have been supplied by the casual farewell of Franzchen. The boy was in the plot, and knew what had happened, yet his demeanour was serene and normal. Lester gained a new confidence. He had suspected that the boy might prove a weak link in his supporting chain: now it appeared that he was to be a dependable ally.

The great clock of the cathedral struck twelve. Did the little puppets do their prancing at midnight as well as at midday, Lester pondered, inconsequentially—for the astronomical clock of Strasbourg is a monument of the clockmaker's art, with its fantastic procession of saints and hours. As the last chime boomed, Lester rose. He faced a long and anxious day.

He found the couch of the dead man—scarcely a bed so much as a divan covered with rugs. The room was untidy, for Zodius lived alone. Franzchen cleaned the kitchen and prepared meals, but was not allowed in the Master's bedroom. Lester dozed uneasily, and was glad of the coming of dawn.

Sunday was a day of intense study. Zodius might be untidy in his room, but was careful in his business. All his clients were

card-indexed, with the fullest details about them, and what they had been told. Consultation of the records confirmed that Zodiuss was a fake. Obviously he had some knowledge of astrology, or he would never have been invited to attend the International Astrologers' Congress. But it was clear that he had no real faith in the science: moreover, mingled with his astrology were examples of elementary fortune-telling.

Franzchen had left a list of clients with appointments for Monday. Three-quarters of them were women. Primed with the information on their cards, Lester felt confident. His intensive training would now be put to the test. He was grateful for the advantage he had had in seeing Zodiuss in action. Now he could imitate his mannerisms and his voice.

Franzchen arrived in good time on Monday morning. He brought with him a new loaf and prepared for Lester a cup of coffee—or what passed for coffee in Strasbourg in the early months of 1943. He made no reference to the change of character, always addressing Lester as "Master."

Lester repressed his excitement as he approached his first interview. His dramatic performance was excellent, and the elderly widow who consulted him had no suspicion. She was a fervent believer in the power of the stars—one of the cases for which Zodiuss had cast a natal horoscope.

The day passed without incident: each interview added to Lester's gathering confidence. His clients appeared very satisfied for, acting on the assumption that he was unlikely to see them again, he gave them more than their money's worth of assurance and prophecy. Mulheim slipping in after the last visitor had left, found him almost exuberantly happy.

"You are a great man," Mulheim commented. "Not in a dozen worlds could I do this."

"We all play our part."

"There are real brains behind this affair. The more I think of it, the more I am astounded."

"Yes, my friend, the German Secret Service has no monopoly of brains. British Intelligence is as good as any in the world."

"If this is a sample, it is better," Mulheim declared. "Now, there is nothing I can do?"

"I think not. Keep in touch with me. All we need now is the letter from Breslau. In some ways the sooner it comes, the better. On the other hand, this practice in my new trade is very useful."

"It is amazing. Franzchen says that you have been magnificent. He would never have known that you were not the real Zodius, he declared."

The lengthy but lucrative array of consultants continued to arrive next day—apparently newspaper astrologers were not the only ones to make good money. As the days passed, Lester grew more eager for the main action. British and American successes in North Africa supplied an additional urge.

Just before the first client arrived on Saturday morning, Franzchen entered the consulting room.

"The postman has a registered letter, Master," he announced. "He says that you must sign for it yourself. Shall I bring him in?"

There was something significant in the boy's tone—evidently he knew of the expected letter from Breslau. At Lester's nod he retired: a moment later the postman entered the room. Now Lester saw the reason for Franzchen's tone—for the postman was one of Mulheim's companions on the night of the execution—the man who had first presented the automatic to Zodius!

He grinned cheerfully at Lester as he handed over the letter.

"This is what you are waiting for, I think," he said. "The registration stamp is Breslau."

Lester ripped open the censor's paper seal, and studied the signature.

"This is it," he agreed.

"Good. Now my friend will be himself again."

"What do you mean?"

"Did you not know? The third man who came with Mulheim and me last Saturday—his name was Henrik Pfiffstein. He loaned you his identity for a week or two: now he can have it back. Sign here, please. Goodbye—and good luck."

For the first hour of the morning Lester was very distraught—fortunately, it is a fault which passes easily with an astrologer: his clients assume that his mind is moving in other spheres. At the luncheon interval he re-read the letter, again and again.

"My dear brother," it began. "More than once have I thought of you since we last met at Düsseldorf and compared our experiences. But these last two months, during the increasing of the moon, you have been appearing constantly in my dreams.

"In them always you come here to me, in Breslau. And assuredly

I need your help, for I have many difficult problems here. Could you not come to see me? Now that you are German, there should be no difficulty.

"So come. Together we can do much to win the war and rid the world of our enemies. Even clever men do not know what is sometimes revealed to us, and we can point out The Way to them.

"I await you, brother mine.

Luna."

After his last client had gone, Lester sat back in quiet satisfaction. Colonel Metcalfe had provided him a reasonably secure entry into Germany—he could do no more. But this essential background was brilliantly conceived and executed. Lester had that best of disguises, a character—a personality, that of a dead man. What is more, he enjoyed the protection of the Gestapo, since he was one of their agents. Here was one incidental difficulty, in that he did not know the name of his chief: Zodius, naturally enough, had made no notes about his traitorous activities.

And now the entry into Germany was open: Lester would go to Breslau, where already this woman astrologer Luna had made some valuable contacts. Now the individual adventure would begin. To date Lester had merely executed the plans made by others. True, even that demanded consummate courage and nerve, but these were the bases of his profession.

The police office would be open on Sunday. He walked round boldly. The few people on the pavements glanced at him only casually—the striking figure of Professor Zodius was a familiar sight in Strasbourg.

The man at the door directed him to the office where permission to travel could be obtained—although Alsace was claimed to be part of the Reich, it was still necessary to get permission to cross the old frontier. He joined a small queue, waiting patiently. Some of our most persistent recollections of the war in after years will be of darkness, broken glass and queues.

He had to wait for more than an hour, eyed with curiosity by his neighbours. Then he found himself facing a burly police sergeant—German, not Alsatian.

"Well?"—very brusquely, from the policeman.

"I wish to travel into the Reich, to Breslau."

"Ah! I know you—you are that fortune-teller chap, aren't you?"

"I am a professor of astrology," said Lester with dignity. The policeman regarded him in undisguised scorn. His own hair was clipped short and brittle, and the sight of Lester's flowing white locks appeared to disgust him.

"Why do you want to go to Breslau?" he demanded.

Lester handed over the letter. He was rather bewildered. Was this how the German police treated their own agents? Or was the sergeant acting a part cleverly because other people were present in the room?

"Is this all?" the sergeant queried.

"Yes. Is it not enough?"

"No. There is no travel for pleasure. The Reich railways are needed for war transport."

"But this lady says——"

"Luna—another fortune-teller, I suppose," the sergeant sneered.

"If I had my way—but we are wasting time. Your application is refused. Next."

Here was a completely unexpected situation. It would be fantastic if the carefully-laid scheme should collapse on such a trifle. His irritation grew: if he could but contact his Gestapo chief, then the journey ought to be readily arranged. Nothing could be done that day. On the Monday night, however, he sent Franzchen round to ask Mulheim to call.

Mulheim could not help. His underground organisation knew a lot, but did not know the name of the man for whom Zodiuss worked. Together, during the night, the two men made a new and thorough search of all the dead man's papers, but they yielded no clue.

There remained only patience. Yet it was very galling, to be on the edge of adventure, and yet to wait. Valuable experience as it was, Lester wearied of the continuous succession of plaintive clients. True, he was interested in the espionage possibilities of his new calling. It was amazing what fragments of information he collected from his own talkative clients—fragments which, with others, might link together to form a valuable jigsaw picture. He passed on a good many useful points to Mulheim, for transmission to London.

Franzchen left with him on Thursday evening a list of the morrow's engagements. Following his routine, he consulted Zodiuss' card index, and memorised the necessary details. But two names were of new clients, evidently—the records contained no mention of them. This was a daily occurrence, of course.

"Do you know anything about these two new people, Franzchen?" he asked, the following morning.

"Only one new client today, Master," Franzchen corrected. "Frau Mittendorf. She's the wife of a local lawyer, much older than herself. I heard that she'd been having an affair with a German officer who has just been ordered off to the Russian front."

Franzchen knew all the gossip of Strasbourg, and his hints were invaluable. Lester now knew the character of his new client, who would be anxious as to the welfare of her "brother" or "cousin," who had been ordered into danger.

"And this Herr Hausmann?"

"He is not new, Master. He comes often. Why, you—Professor Zodius—told me that I was always to fit him in whenever he wanted to see you."

"All right, Franzchen. I expect his card is out of place. I'll look again."

Inwardly, Lester's excitement surged. There was no card for Hausmann, he was quite certain of that. And the man was to see Zodius whenever he wanted! The indications were clear.

Hausmann arrived early in the afternoon. As soon as Zodius appeared, the visitor turned to the door behind the curtains, to make certain that it was closed.

"Well, Zodius, what's all this?" he began. "I heard gossip in the police canteen—you had been to the station. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"Why? I ordered you never to be seen there," Hausmann snapped. "There must be no suggestion of any connection——"

"There was not, have no fear," Lester put in, calmly. "I merely wanted a permit to travel. The fool of a sergeant refused it. So I had to wait until you came. I now make the application to you."

He passed over the letter from Breslau. Hausmann frowned as he read it.

"I cannot agree. You are too valuable to me here," he said. "I cannot spare you for anything so trivial."

"This is not trivial," Lester said, firmly.

"It is——"

"May I suggest that you telephone to Breslau to find out if it is trivial?" Lester went on. "Then you will gain credit. If it is trivial, there is no harm done. If not—I assure you that you will be well thought of."

A German official is always happy to refer a problem to some-

body else. Somewhat mollified, Hausmann went off, after arranging to return in the evening.

When he arrived, his demeanour was completely changed. He beamed friendly cheerfulness.

"I say, that Luna of yours is hot," he announced. "Goodness knows who she is, but as soon as I mentioned the business, I was told, 'Do as she says, and quickly.'"

"I knew that it would be so. You will get credit for this."

Hausmann was evidently of the same opinion: he was almost bubbling with cheerfulness and bore not the slightest resemblance to the conventional picture of a Gestapo chief.

"I see that she writes, 'My dear Brother,'" he chuckled, "but I take it that she isn't your sister?"

"She is not," Lester smiled. "Only in the professional sense. She is just a fellow astrologer, and a very clever one. I have not seen her since the war began."

"Now, what are we going to say about your disappearance."

"Tomorrow it will be obvious to my clients that I am ill; and the next day. The news will spread quickly—Zodius is a well-known character of Strasbourg. I shall cough a great deal—a recurrence of an old trouble. At my last attack I went to Switzerland, and my sojourn did me a lot of good. So a beneficent police service will give me permission to go to Switzerland again."

"Excellent, my dear Zodius!" Hausmann commented. "You should have been an Intelligence agent!"

"I am," said Lester.

Hausmann chuckled again. "I'm not saying that you haven't been very useful," he said. "And don't stay in Breslau for ever—I shall need you back here. Well, you arrange your illness and I'll arrange the journey. Shall we say next Tuesday? That will give us time."

He got up to go. Lester was as cheerful as his friend, but did not show it.

Hausmann passed through the curtains and opened the door. At the last minute he paused. "'My dear Brother,'" he chuckled. "I suppose that your wife knows all about your sister Luna? You naughty old dog!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE train chugged slowly across Germany. There were innumerable halts, and many changes. With the frequent ticket-collector came a plain-clothes policeman, who examined all identity papers and travelling passes. Lester had no difficulty at all: it appeared that there was some special mark on his pass which identified him as a Gestapo agent.

One detail troubled him. The whole scheme had progressed smoothly. He was entering Germany for the major part of his mission under almost perfect conditions—a real personality, and under Gestapo protection. But that last remark made by Hausmann was disconcerting. "I suppose that your wife knows all about your sister Luna?"

This was the first indication that Zodius had a wife. The mass of detail supplied to Lester had never mentioned her. Hurried consultation with Franzchen and Mulheim had yielded no results—they had never heard of a Frau Zodius. Nor did his private papers suggest any hint.

Yet anxiety on such a detail could be exaggerated. Wherever she was, it was apparent that Frau Zodius was not in close touch with her husband. Mulheim was confident that she did not live in Strasbourg—Zodius had been shadowed for weeks past every time he left the house. Franzchen was equally certain that no letters from her arrived by post. The unsatisfactory situation had to be accepted.

As the hours passed wearily, Lester's excitement mastered his fatigue. Apart from the thrill of approaching action, he was very anxious to meet his "sister" astrologer, Luna. He had wired ahead the time of his arrival. He anticipated no difficulty about their meeting. Wernski, the Polish agent, had given him a full description of her, and she had only to look for Zodius to find Lester.

In his trunk reposed the seer's robes and some of his impedimenta, including his books. The robes were old, but maybe that was an advantage. Magicians always cling to old friends: should they need new clothes or equipment, it is a superstition that all articles should be virgin new—should never have been worn or used by anybody else. Most interesting part of Zodius' belongings was his

library of magic. A dozen books, most of them very old, must travel to Breslau. Indeed, Lester could not make up his mind about Zodius. By his actions he was obviously an ordinary fake fortune-teller, but his library suggested that he was a serious student of astrology. The explanation probably was that he had begun as a serious student, and had degenerated into a fortune-teller for pecuniary gain.

The train was very late: the winter dusk was descending miserably as it reached Breslau: the afternoon was damp and cold. Yet Lester warmed as he saw Luna standing by the ticket barrier, waving to him. He would have recognized her by Wernski's description, but she picked him out first.

Not a dozen words passed. No taxis were available, but her flat was not far away. She led him along Gartenstrasse into Hofchenstrasse. Half-way down the street she halted, and turned up a short flight of stone steps to slip a latch-key into the lock.

A warm fire burned in a cosy room at the end of the hall.

"Come in," she said, almost in a whisper. "Take off your coat, and let me look at you!"

He doffed his coat and hat and her gaze was as intense as Mulheim's had been.

"This is fantastic!" she muttered. "Incredible! After this, I can believe anything—even the crystal or the cards! Turn round—walk across the room! Now speak to me!"

He went through his paces at her command. Then she slipped her hand softly into his.

"If you are as magnificent in everything else as you are in this impersonation, then we shall do great things together," she said.

"I am confident," Lester agreed. "But now, take off your coat and let me look at you."

She smiled as she obeyed. His gaze was not less eager than hers had been. He saw a woman, rather tall, with a heavy weight of hair, jet black, gathered straight back from the forehead and carried at the back of the head in a scarlet net. She carried herself well, and was shapely rather than slender—not buxom, but with pleasant curves. Her dress was long, and of black velvet, again relieved by a broad scarlet belt of velvet at the waist. Later she showed him that this belt was ingenious. For clients where an attractive appearance might be an advantage, it pulled together at a touch, and at the same time, gathered the velvet into folds at the back: her

frock now fitted tightly to her very shapely figure. On other occasions, with the belt slack, her loosened dress hung limply like a robe, effectively disguising her physical charms. On the day of their first meeting, Lester recalled later, the belt was pulled tight.

Wernski had said that she was round about thirty, but she looked older. This was probably part of her professional make-up: elderly clients are not fond of accepting advice from youngsters, however clever they may be in their profession.

His first impressions were more than favourable. He liked her eyes; they were dark, and instead of the sparkle usually associated with fortune-tellers, they were limpid and sincere.

"Well, what do you think of me?" she asked, smiling.

"I think that you are no German," he said.

"Right! Then what am I?"

"Of Slav stock, I should say—but there is a dash of gypsy about your cheekbones."

"Right again! I am Polish——"

"Ah!" Now Lester understood. I have said that we owe a great debt to the thousands of Polish volunteers who have worked as British agents in Germany. There were over a million Poles who were German subjects when the war began: the Nazis have learned that it is very dangerous to have a hostile minority in their midst.

"My family has lived in Silesia for generations," she added. "It was here when Frederick the Great seized the province. But I have never forgotten my Polish descent—my mother saw to that—although we are technically Germans."

"And what is your name—or would you rather not tell me?"

"Of course I will tell you. My name is Lewinski."

"Lewinski!" Lester's hand went to his head—there was something familiar about the name.

"Go on, friend, you are warm on the scent!" Again she flashed her friendly smile.

"Lewinski! I've got it!" he cried. "Lewinski is the real family name of Field-Marshal von Manstein!"

She nodded, obviously pleased at her new partner's erudite background. It is perfectly true that the real name of von Manstein, the German commander on the Eastern front, is Lewinski. Nor is it unusual for notable Germans to bear foreign names, or to be of foreign stock—especially of the Slav races. A thousand years ago the Slav tribes extended right across the territory which is now

Germany as far as the river Elbe: dozens of Slav place-names remain to perpetuate their memory, and admixtures of their blood run freely in German veins—defying all Hitler's theories of a pure-blooded master race. Bismarck was a scion of a German family of Slav origin: Hitler himself has to admit Slavs among his ancestors, like millions of other Germans—especially those in the southern and eastern frontier regions. So there was nothing unusual in the fact that Manstein was an adopted name, replacing that of Lewinski—which might have been embarrassing when its owner marched his armies against the Poles and Russians.

"I'm only a/distant relative," she said. "My grandfather was the black sheep of the family. You take full marks again, my friend, for he ran away with a Hungarian gypsy!"

But in Germany family ramifications are wide and influential. However distant, she was a relative of Field Marshal von Manstein, and local officials would bow down to her. Now one thing which had puzzled Lester was made clear: despite Hitler's fondness for astrologers, he had forbidden them to practise publicly in Germany. Yet Luna had been allowed to carry on! The reason was now apparent.

"Yes, I had no difficulty in getting a licence," she smiled at his comment. "There was a terrific row after Hess flew to Scotland, you know?"

"No, I heard nothing of that."

"Oh, Hess was a great admirer of occultism—dabbled in it himself. Most Germans did. There has been an enormous wave of interest and superstition in the last few years. All sorts of fakes flourished—astrologers, fortune-tellers, crystal-gazers, clairvoyants. It was pathetic—escapism from the evil world about us: any comforting dope could be sold for good money."

"And Hitler himself—"

"Oh, yes, it's quite true. Mark this, my friend, his astrologers have come to sticky ends. The first was a Viennese named Eric Hanussen. His protector was Count Helldorf, the Nazi police chief of Berlin. He took the oracle to Hitler, who used him so long as he guessed right! Hanussen predicted the Reichstag fire and his own violent death."

"Well, his first shot was good. What about the second?"

"Absolutely accurate. His mutilated body was found in a dark street of Berlin. Then Hitler adopted a woman occultist named Elsbeth Ebertin. She used to sell occult papers in a chain of shops

till she was promoted to be the Führer's confidant. Three years ago she disappeared without trace. Then a man named Keppler got the job—and he hasn't been heard of lately, either ! ”

“ This is a cheerful prospect ! ” Lester grinned. “ But what about Hess ? ”

“ Oh, he was in the business up to the neck. So when he disgraced himself, occultism was outlawed. At least, it was put under control. The Ministry of Health at Berlin has now an Occult Section, directed by Dr. Hoerman, of Munich. In future, no ghost may appear unless licensed by Dr. Hoerman.”

Lester laughed aloud. “ That's what it really comes down to,” she declared. “ There was almost a program against astrologers by the police. The argument was very confused. Some said that Hess was a disgrace and all copyists must be punished. Others thought that Hess had been misled by the false prophecies of his tame occultists, so punished indiscriminately. So now only those guaranteed by the Gestapo are allowed to carry on. We are supposed to work to orders—we get regular ‘ advice ’ as to the type of prophecy we should hand out.”

“ I see. Hitler fakes yesterday, Goebbels fakes today and you are to fake tomorrow ! ”

“ Exactly ! Some of our clairvoyant friends have experienced some difficulty in controlling their controls ! ”

“ Anyway, not even Dr. Hoerman could refuse a licence to a relative of von Manstein,” Lester chuckled. “ No wonder that the Gestapo at Strasbourg nearly fell over themselves when they telephoned to Breslau ! ” he commented.

“ I do not think that was the reason. I expect it was because the police here know that I am friendly with the wife of the local commander in Breslau, General Hoffmann.”

“ Hoffmann ? Any relation to *the* Hoffmann ? ” *

“ Yes. His nephew.”

“ Ah ! Now everything is indeed clear ! ”

Lester jumped up from his chair and paced the room in his intense excitement. He had never anticipated a background half

* General Max Hoffmann was probably the cleverest commander produced by the Germans during the war of 1914-18. He was the brain behind the successful Hindenburg-Ludendorff combination—he had actually initiated the moves for the Battle of Tannenberg before they took over the command. For an account of his competence, see “ A History of the World War,” by Capt. B. H. Liddell Hart. Hoffman is held in great repute, especially in German military circles. D.B.

so promising. Again he halted to praise the calm planning of Colonel Metcalfe and the clever intrigue of the Polish agent, Wernski. No spy ever entered upon a mission which was so loyally backed.

"Luna, my friend," he said. "This is beyond my wildest dreams. You are right—together you and I can do great things. But go on—fill in the background."

"I have had to concern myself with details," she replied. "It is easy to get casual information out of my clients. Most of it consists of trifles, but I pass them on to Wernski's resident agent here, and he puts them together. Occasionally I have been able to get something more important—from General Hoffmann's wife, for example."

"I should like to hear more about her."

"I was coming to that. It was because of her that Wernski selected me for this bigger task, and it was on my suggestion that Zodiuss of Alsace was chosen to be my partner, since I know so little of military affairs. Frau Hoffmann is my prize client. She believes in me implicitly—as she ought to do, as I have always told her the truth."

"You are a good guesser ? "

"Better than that ! She does not know it, but her housemaid is a Polish patriot like me ! Thus, when Frau Hoffmann first came to me, almost as a joke, I was able to tell her quite a lot about her home and family. You can imagine how she sucked it in—and came again. Yes, she has been very useful to me—and will be to us."

"Grand ! And how do we work ? "

"For weeks past I have been telling her about you, my brother in astrology : about my dreams. I have built you up—you are a very great man in our profession. I told her what an influence you had on me at Düsseldorf : how our minds were on the same wavelength and how you could even read my thoughts. A sort of twin soul business—or, in more flowery language, we are spiritually *en rapport*. Like most Germans, she is incurably receptive of sentimentalities. She is just longing to meet you—is throwing a special party for your benefit. And, naturally, at that party you must make a hit."

"How ? "

"It ought to be easy—with her housemaid as our friend ! "

"Yes. We must think out an idea——"

"I have thought of one. And now, let us eat. You must be famished after your journey. The proprietor of a little restaurant is one of my clients. I have told him about you also. There is not much that he can do these days, but he is going to give us a meal in the room behind the shop."

"I confess that I am ready for it," Lester admitted. After the comparatively good fare of England, the spartan German rations left a hungry feeling.

"By the way," Luna went on. "Where will you stay? Most of the hotels are occupied by military hospitals——"

"Could I not stay here?" Lester suggested.

"Of course!" she exclaimed. "But I live here alone."

"Does that matter—between a spiritual sister and brother?" he smiled.

"No, not at all. But you are English—I thought that you might be too conventional."

"If you freely agree, I shall stay here."

"More than that, I *want* you to stay," she said.

The restaurant proprietor was very impressed with the personality of Zodiüs. He served them himself, and produced a reasonable meal. Obviously he expected a few special words from the Alsatian seer. He got them, and was thrilled.

Luna and Zodiüs returned to the flat. Over the meal they had naturally avoided the one subject which dominated their minds. They talked of the Astrologers' Congress at Düsseldorf, of the portents for the year: the restaurant proprietor listened eagerly to such scraps of conversation as he could pick up. Probably he did not understand one word in ten of the technical terms they used, but it is always pleasant to be even on the edge of greatness—and the words were not less impressive for that!

"We will talk no more tonight, my brother," Luna said suddenly as they regained the house. "There is so much to say, but your journey has been very long."

Lester protested, but she was insistent. She was right, too. It was not merely a question of fatigue after the journey of two days and nights: in moments of excitement and exhilaration such as followed a meeting in unusual circumstances, the mood was not ripe for momentous decisions.

"This is your room. Goodnight, my brother."

She held out her hand. He remembered that she was Polish,

stooped down and kissed it. A flush of appreciation crossed her cheeks.

"That was kind," she whispered. "And clever. Yes, together we will do big things. Goodnight. Forget until the morning."

Easier ordered than accomplished. Fantastic schemes danced through Lester's brain before the relief of sleep arrived.

Luna had put off her clients on the plea of illness. There was a lot to do. Like Zodius, she did not confine herself to the practice of astrology.

"Have you any experience of hypnotism?" she asked.

"I've seen a few experiments," he said. "Of course, I'm a complete sceptic as to the extravagant claims made for it."

"But you are a good actor. And with a personality like yours—have you ever experimented in spiritualism?"

"No."

"I have. It was a failure with me. I could not fall into a trance. But I can pretend to fall. I have a lot of ideas."

So had Lester. They pooled their suggestions, and set to work. It was almost like the rehearsal of a stage play, with all kinds of allowances for things which might go wrong.

As a fortune-teller Luna might be as great a fraud as Zodius, but Lester perceived that she was a more astute observer of human nature and that her penetration was keen. Her mind was abnormally sensitive, he soon discovered.

There was not too much time. General Hoffmann's wife was burning to throw her party. Later in the day Luna telephoned her patron.

"Next Sunday," she said to Lester. "We have five days. I must see Anna."

"Who is Anna?"

"Frau Hoffman's housemaid. She has been more than useful—not merely to me, but to the cause. She is a pretty girl, and General Hoffmann's orderlies look at her—and talk to her. Now let us decide upon our final plan."

That night, using the darkness as a cover, Lester walked round to the Gestapo headquarters of Breslau. His reception was warm—evidently Herr Hausmann at Strasbourg had spoken well of him.

"I don't suppose that there is anything here which I can do," Lester said. "I'm more useful on my own ground."

"Of course. Will you be here long?"

"A few weeks, maybe. I don't know."

"I understand. Well, I hope you have a good time at Frau Hoffmann's party on Sunday."

Lester was too well trained to exhibit any surprise. The telephone is not secret, and the Gestapo could easily spy on a general's wife: the time might come when the Nazi party wished to get rid of the general! Probably by this time Frau Hoffman was excitedly telephoning invitations to her friends.

When Lester heard from Luna how Frau Hoffmann had babbled of her husband's affairs, he marvelled at the folly of women—and of men, who confided military secrets to their wives. It was unusual, surely, in Germany, where the woman is still relegated to a secondary position. Luna agreed, but said that General Hoffmann was not a strong character, while his wife, if empty-headed, was one of those wheedling people to whom vapid conversation is the spice of life.

It was good that their careful rehearsals had allowed for unforeseeable possibilities. Anna, the housemaid, admitted them to Hoffmann's house—a pretty girl, Lester agreed. As they passed her, she informed them in a whisper that General Hoffmann had been called away on military duty, and would not be present.

This was a major disappointment. Nevertheless, they made what they could of it.

Frau Hoffmann almost bumbled with delight when she saw Zodius.

"My husband——" she began.

"I shall not see your husband tonight," Lester interrupted. "Later, but not tonight. The stars in the east beckon, and he obeys."

As Hoffmann's military district covered the whole of Silesia, the greater part of which stretched to the east of Breslau, this was a fairly safe guess. But to Frau Hoffmann it was marvellous.

Already she was at Zodius' feet as she ushered him into the drawing room. Here about twenty people were gathered—mostly women, but including three middle-aged civilians and a couple of officers—presumably members of the general's staff. Frau Hoffmann would have presented him to each in turn, but he declined courteously but very firmly. He had already divined the way in which to treat his hostess: he gave his orders.

"Tell them to be quiet," he said. "And there is too much light."

She hurried to obey his bidding. The chattering ceased abruptly: it seemed as if the women were over-awed by the personality of

Zodius. He declined the chair his hostess offered and took a high chair by a table : Luna sank at his feet dramatically.

The lights were lowered : Lester allowed the silence to increase the tension in the atmosphere. Now came his first test—a feat of memory rather than of magic. Anna had supplied a list of the guests, and Luna had described them and had indicated their peculiarities—it is the business of a fortune-teller to know unusual trifles. On such a basis he was to improvise.

He allowed the intense quiet to continue until the nerves of his audience were strained.

"Tonight I talked with the stars," he said, almost in a whisper. He had risen, and appeared unnaturally tall in the dim light, his shock of white hair crowning his massive head, and the flash of his eyes cleverly exploited. "It is understood that the stars are not prophets—they only point the way. I am a humble student : sometimes I may stumble over the message which the stars spell out for me. In knowledge we are still as infants, and before us trembles a great void, the unknown.

"To many, in this hour, there is danger. To some, happiness. Tonight I noted Venus in the fifth, sextile to Mars. To some women this brings happiness. To you!" Suddenly Zodius stepped across the room and halted in front of a young woman, fresh-cheeked and buxom. She stared at him, her lips apart.

"Joy comes to you. For long you have wished for a child. The moment is propitious."

The woman blushed ; then tears of joy trickled down her cheeks. The other women looked at her in sympathetic interest. Lester heard the whisper, "How did he know?"

He had begun with the simplest case. The girl had been married over a year ago, and her husband had been sent immediately to Norway. Now, at any moment, he was expected to arrive in Breslau on leave.

Zodius moved on. In front of him now sat a man in civilian clothes : apart from Luna's background of information, Zodius had not been slow to remark the concern in the man's eyes.

"Uranus in the eighth, square Venus," he muttered. "My friend, life is hard, and death is dark. There is no hope in the stars."

The woman beside him began to sob.

"There must be hope!" she cried. "There must be!"

"Hope is never killed, but it dies. Time heals. You have time. I see darkness now, but not for ever—and not complete."

The couple's son had been reported missing in Russia, Lester knew. It would have been a cheaper way to success to have given them easy comfort, but in the long run Lester was confident that his policy would pay.

"No, I have nothing for you," Lester said to a woman who sought to detain him as he passed along the room. "Here is a man who needs me. Take every care, my friend. The New Moon found the luminaries unsuspected. Men may doubt the influence of the stars, but who can doubt the influence of the moon? Those who work on the earth and in the earth must beware. Give in to fate, my friend. Difficult days are foreshadowed. For once the way of sacrifice pays. There is little profit in the earth for many months. Then it will return. Give generously when fate demands."

The man was a mineowner, and was threatened with labour difficulties—possible even in Nazi Germany in the fourth year of war, when tempers were strained and the prospects not very bright. Lester had debated with himself what to do with this information. The men were asking for a large wage increase. Should Lester recommend the mineowner to refuse and precipitate a strike? He dismissed the idea—discipline was so severe and punishment so drastic that a major strike was scarcely possible. So he decided on the other alternative. Wage increases in a land short of consumer goods spelled inflation—just as important on the question of morale. There is no man more discontented than the man who has money and finds nothing to buy with it.

Obviously Zodiuss had made a very deep impression. The women in particular were listening avidly. One of two more comments, of important-sounding generalities, and he halted before his hostess: he bowed—or rather, he inclined his head as might a sage of old who wished to show courtesy to a suppliant.

"You permit me, dear lady? Last night, with my sister, I was moved to study your horoscope. The stars have smiled upon you, as one would expect of one born under such favourable auspices—with Jupiter, the Planet of Good Fortune, in the eleventh House—as Luna has told you, this is the aspect of your horoscope which affects your friends. But we have studied your progressed horoscope—the progressed Sun will be in parallel to Uranus at the same moment. Uranus means a change of fortune—sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse."

"What? You must tell me more!" she cried.

"As I read the horoscope, no change awaits you personally. But

Jupiter in the eleventh House—that means that we must watch your family as well as your outside friends. I am not happy," he said with dramatic slowness.

"My husband!" her cry was almost a shriek.

"He is a soldier. Yet his horoscope is clear, and favourable. I see that he was born with the Sun, Mercury and Uranus in Libra, this group being in favourable configuration with Mars, Saturn and Neptune. For the following months the progressed Sun is sextile to the natal Venus. I see no harm to your husband."

"Then—it cannot be my babies!" Frau Hoffmann's distress was obvious: he might already have pronounced their death sentence.

He made no effort to relieve her distress.

"I can only sense the nearness of danger: I cannot predict its detail. Nor do I mean that it cannot be avoided. To threaten is not to strike. Wait. I wish to try an experiment. For long my sister and I have been attempting to concentrate our two minds, as on one plane of thought, on the same problem. We believe that we are on the verge of great discoveries—the thesis we shall write will rank with the work of Copernicus and Galileo. It is not given to all to peer into the unknown: only a sensitive mind can feel the influence of the stars. Will you sit here, my hostess? Luna and I will sit by you. We want your atmosphere. You yourself, please relax. Think in turn of your children, one after the other. You have a boy and a girl?"

"Yes," she breathed, her eyes anxious.

"Were you a man, then I myself would grasp your hands. But," he smiled gravely, "even an Adept must respect the conventions of society without which it could not live. My sister shall hold your hands, and I shall try to read the impact of your thoughts upon her mind. Think alternately for half a minute about the boy—nothing but him—his play, his food, his talk and especially of the day of his birth. Then of the girl. The rest of you—absolute silence."

The scene may have been theatrical, but the personality of Zodius dominated it. Now Luna came forward with a low chair. Sitting on it, she nestled close to Frau Hoffmann, lightly grasping her hands. Lester sat facing them. Even in the dimmed light the face of Frau Hoffman was as pale as that of Zodius.

The intense silence was disturbed by a sound from one of the women—almost a sob.

"Silence!" Lester cried angrily. "Go outside, those who cannot be quiet! Begin again, my hostess."

The seconds passed, and the minutes. The intensity was almost unbearable. Zodiuss began to bend forward, almost imperceptibly. Suddenly he sat upright : he seemed to be listening to some inaudible sound.

"Now!" cried Zodiuss and Luna simultaneously.

"Brother, it is done—the word came at the same moment!" said Luna exultantly.

"Wait! Tell me, dear lady, which of your children was in your mind when we uttered that word."

"My son!" she whispered, fearfully.

"Wait!" he cried, dramatically. "Send for something which belongs to your son—an article of clothing, a toy—something which is constantly with him."

In agitated fashion Frau Hoffmann gave the necessary orders.

"I have experimented in psychometry," he explained, as the maid Anna brought a vest and a toy gun. "Silence, please!" He held both articles close to his forehead. The tension mounted as the moments passed. Suddenly he started: there was an impression as if he were perspiring: his eyes flashed with even more than their normal brilliance.

"I see danger!" he cried. "Yes—it is your son! Do not be afraid, dear lady. Danger foreseen is half-averted. Let us set to work. Luna has your son's horoscope—a full one, as you could give the exact hour and minute of his birth. It is favourable. But a natal horoscope can only cover general conditions. Now I wish to make a further experiment—another line of study which Luna and I have pursued. It is not yet complete, but already we have achieved amazing results. It is very personal to you, dear lady. Do you wish that these other people should go?"

"No," she whispered. There was something suspiciously like a gasp of relief from the rest of the company: not willingly would they have missed the culmination of the drama.

"As you will. It may be that you cannot tell me what I need to know. Astrology has based its studies on the hour and place of birth. My sister and I have based our new studies upon the hour and place of *conception*. Our theories are not entirely original. Thousands of years ago, Indian astrologers studied the possibilities, but unfortunately their records are lost. In later centuries wise Hindus advocated that a man should avail himself of particular planetary positions if he desired an excellent issue—just as business men of old sought an 'election' from the seers before making a

journey, or concluding an important deal. Parasara, who was a great astronomer and astrologer, calculated a favourable hour for conception, and at it joined a boatman's daughter on an island in the Jumna : the issue was the great Vedavyasa. A Brahmin astrologer also read the stars before mating with a potter's daughter, and their son was known to the world as Salivahana. At one time such consultation was quite common. Now it is not. My sister and I have revived its study. Too often, alas, we have to work backwards. It is not easy. Exact data is often difficult to procure. Often we have obtained conflicting results, only to find that the data given to us was wrong. Dear lady, can you tell me when and where your son was conceived ? ”

“ Yes,” she whispered. “ If I may refer to my diary.”

She rose from the chair : then swayed, and would have fallen, but an officer took her arm firmly and led her to a dainty desk. She searched in a drawer for the volume of the year.

“ You can be certain ? ” Zodius asked, gently, as she returned to her chair.

“ Quite certain. Karl was my second child. My husband was away on service in Hanover. He sent me a telegram—there were some manoeuvres in the Harz Mountains. On the last night he would be free.”

“ And that was the time ? ”

“ Yes, definitely. So I have only to find the date—here it is : May 30th, 1931. In the evening—about ten o'clock,” she whispered.

“ Thank you. It does not follow that this was the moment when the impregnation took place, but on this basis we can calculate. Yours was a normal pregnancy ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ The period from impregnation to birth is ten revolutions of the moon—ten times 27·32 days. Sometimes this is amended by purely physical causes. Hence the difficulty of our study, in that too often the available data is faulty. My sister and I will set to work. Knowing that danger threatened your children, we brought with us the ephemeris for the appropriate year for each of them, making our calculations on 27·2 days before birth. So now we will work out a new horoscope for your son. And you, dear lady, and your friends, you may relax. Put up the lights. Let there be music—you may dance if you wish, or sing.”

The tension relieved, the guests broke into a buzz of excited con-

versation. Zodius and Luna walked to Frau Hoffmann's desk and sat down to work. The lights went up, and somebody switched on the radio, but nobody attempted to dance—they were all too anxious to talk.

"You are sure that we do not disturb you?" Frau Hoffmann asked, anxiously.

"You cannot. We are in another world."

The high pitch of the voices attested to the intense strain on the minds and nerves of the company.

"Magnificent, my brother!" Luna whispered.

He sat with his head in his hands, as if virtue had gone out of him. Her practised fingers sketched out the horoscope.

Now they studied it intently. The hub of conversation died: the guests crowded round them, eager for news. Zodius turned to Frau Hoffmann.

"Danger threatens your boy," he said. "We must avert it. Yet I am still puzzled. The danger comes from above, and at night."

"The English! Bombs!" she cried.

"No. The skies are not concerned. Moreover, the adverse influence at this juncture is not Mars, the planet of war, but Mercury, the craftsman's planet, the power which presides over the complicated material fabric of our civilisation. The danger, I conclude, is material—and it is here, in Breslau, from some thing which is part of our life. Can you send your son away? To some place of nature—the mountains, the forests, or the shores of the sea?"

"Yes. We have a hunting box in the country, in the mountains."

"Send him there, tomorrow. The danger period is from Wednesday to Friday, when the moon sets, squared by Uranus in the seventh House. Be happy, good lady, the boy will not be harmed."

She accepted his word with implicit faith. Most of her fears seemed to be immediately dispelled. Again there was a babble of conversation as the women crowded around Zodius. He shook them off abruptly, almost roughly.

"I am tired. I am going home," he said. "Come, my sister."

He ignored all protests brusquely. Luna was silent as they walked through the quiet streets.

"I wonder if ever was played a scene in history like that of tonight?" she said, as they regained the flat.

"Maybe not," he smiled. "And yet it is only the prologue to the great drama."

"And we can play it! You have confidence now?"

"In every way."

"You have missed your profession, my brother. You should have been an actor."

"I was, once—but didn't do very well," he grinned. "So I went into the Army instead."

"In high drama you may have failed, but in intimate drama you are superb," she declared. "And how you handled those women—especially at the end."

"Treat 'em rough—that's an old motto, whatever the stars may say."

"And now all we have to await is the danger from above. But it will materialise. Anna will see to that—her lover is very practical."

"I suppose there is no danger—letting all those people in?"

"He is a Pole," she said, simply.

"And at the worst, of course, he could only expose us as frauds—he does not know who *Zodius* is."

"Never fear, my brother. He will not betray us—he is a Pole. More than once I have proved his courage."

In spite of their self control, they had to fight their excitement as the days passed. Luna had resumed her practice, presenting specially favoured clients to the visiting seer from Alsace. And twenty tongues were already spreading his fame.

At eleven o'clock on Friday night the two astrologers sat by the fire, waiting: anxiety was written deep in their eyes. The expected ring came on the door bell, not the telephone. They looked at each other in some surprise: then Luna went to the door.

Frau Hoffman rushed in.

"I had to come myself!" she cried. For the moment it seemed as if she were about to fling her arms about *Zodius*' neck. "Oh, how can I thank you? Just as I was going to bed, I heard a terrific crash, in Karl's room. Half the ceiling had fallen in—it is an old house and the plaster is like stone. My Karl might have been killed. Oh, *how* can I thank you?"

For many minutes they had to control her almost hysterical gratitude. Then, as she returned to her car, their apprehensive glances had changed to eyes of triumph.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Now the reputation of Zodiuss was secure. The social salons of Breslau, or their war-time equivalents, buzzed with excited conversation. Clients presented themselves in unwieldy numbers at the flat. Pleading an unfavourable conjunction of the stars, Zodiuss refused to see them: delay stimulates curiosity.

Luna played her part magnificently. Cast for the minor role, she threw all the glory on Zodiuss. Without her he could have done nothing, but she brushed aside his acknowledgments. They were partners.

She was working throughout the day, seeing her regular clients and a few new arrivals. Three nights after the "miraculous" escape of Frau Hoffman's son, Luna joined Lester in their private room at the end of a long day of consultations.

"What's wrong, Luna?" he asked, concerned at her anxious appearance.

"I am nervous," she said. "You know that there may be a lot of fake in our business, but a practitioner must be sensitive. I have just had a new client—I had to see him, because Frau Hoffmann sent him."

"And what about him? Who was he?"

"You saw him the other night at her party—Captain Allenstein."

"Oh, he was one of the two officers there?"

"Yes—the one who helped Frau Hoffmann across to her bureau."

"I remember him. I didn't care for him—he looked a proper Prussian."

"No wonder. I have just been taking details for his horoscope: he was born at Königsberg, in East Prussia, the home of the Junker families. And, brother, I don't like him. Not merely his looks—his atmosphere is wrong. I feel frightened."

She sank on to the floor and leaned her head against his knees, her arm about his legs.

"You are tired, Luna," he said, quietly.

"Yes, but I feel even more when I am tired. That man is evil. I do not trust him. You yourself said last night that our mission was going almost too favourably—that the opposition was too weak to be natural—that our luck was almost too good, in spite of our careful planning. I feel that you are right."

He comforted her, but could not escape nervous qualms. It was true that their success to date had been due to meticulous forethought rather than good luck, but it was equally true that the progress of the plan had been unusually favourable.

"Would a hard-headed Prussian want his fortune told?" she whispered.

It was improbable, but not impossible, he agreed. Certainly Allenstein had not given the impression that he was a weak man who would solicit the aid of magic. His presence at the party was probably involuntary—he was one of General Hoffmann's aides, and social activities were part of his duties.

As he pondered, Lester became uneasy. There was one obvious explanation. He knew already that the Gestapo spied on General Hoffmann, as on everybody else in Germany: it was one of their methods to spy even on their own spies. It might easily be that Captain Allenstein was a Gestapo agent, deliberately planted on Hoffmann's staff.

"He wants to see you, brother," Luna said. "He was very insistent."

"Very well, I will see him," Lester answered, confidently. Yet his confidence was only assumed. True, he had commented jocularly that the case was going almost too easily, but now that potential difficulty had arisen, he was apprehensive. The shadow of danger is always more terrifying than danger itself.

"How can we find anything about him?" he asked.

"I know very little. Frau Hoffmann has not talked much about him. He spends nearly all his time on military duties—he is supposed to be an efficient staff officer. I heard her say that he came of a very good Junker family—his is certainly a very old name."

Why should the Gestapo spy upon him? Lester pondered. Was it definite suspicion, or routine procedure? If the latter, then there was no cause for alarm. But would they use a man of the calibre of Allenstein for a routine observation? Especially as he was an unsuitable man to solicit the aid of an astrologer?

Yet it was difficult to see how any suspicion could have been aroused. Apart from some casual interviews with Luna's clients, the only activity of Zodius had been at the famous party. There his prognostication had been purely domestic—and had been fulfilled.

"There is no possibility that Anna's lover was clumsy in loosening the plaster?" he suggested. "If they found signs of tampering——"

"I think not," she said. "Anna was very satisfied, and she is a careful girl."

"There is one explanation that we have overlooked. The fact that we did so shows that we are strained more than we know. Suppose Allenstein has been detailed to look us over, with a view to bigger work—to decide whether we are charlatans or whether there is something behind our prophecies."

"You mean—that he has been sent by General Hoffmann?"

"Yes. Or maybe by someone still higher."

The thought seemed to comfort her, but brought no assurance to Lester. A spy is accustomed to existence under conditions of strain: he needs to develop a sensitive mind. From the moment of Luna's news Lester was definitely uneasy.

Two or three days passed. While Luna carried out her interviews, Lester studied quietly—to be disturbed occasionally so that he might be presented to some of Luna's most important clients. He had brought with him some of *Zodius'* books and was reading them—with great difficulty: some of them were in archaic German, and others in still more archaic French.

"Have you ever studied Nostradamus, Luna?" he asked one night, as they sat by the fire: as usual, she sat on the floor, leaning against his knees.

"Of course."

"There's a very interesting old copy of his *Centuries* among these books from Strasbourg. I've got an idea—I'm thinking ahead. Can you get into touch with Wernski?"

"Yes—if he is over here. It may take a week or two to get to him."

"That will do. There's no hurry. Could he smuggle a book over to England?"

"Oh, I expect so. He is very clever. Why?"

"I want to get this copy of the *Centuries* to England. When the right moment comes, it may be possible to fake a page."

"What?" She picked up the old book, bound in faded yellow leather.

"Yes. It is difficult, I know, but there are people in England who are very clever at these things. I know a man in the Bank of England——"

"But these jingles of Nostradamus—could anybody improvise them, in this archaic French?"

"That would be the easiest part," he assured her. "That's why I want to see Wernski. I have a friend in London named James

Laver. He is not an astrologer—far from it : he is a *litterateur*, and at the same time one of the art experts at the Victoria and Albert Museum. It so happens that he is the author of a book on Nostradamus *——,”

“ Ah, I begin to see.”

“ Yes. He will have the character and style of the *Centuries* well in his mind, and he is an excellent French scholar.”

“ My dear brother, your resources are marvellous ! ”

“ Yet I could not do without yours,” he smiled. “ You will send for Wernski ? There is no risk ? ”

“ None. He is supposed to be working for the *German Secret Service*. He comes here as one of my clients.”

“ Good. I shall get him to take this Nostradamus book to Colonel Metcalfe, and give him general instructions. At the appropriate moment we shall be able to say in detail what we want. I am certain that Laver will produce it—and Metcalfe will be able to arrange a marvellous faked page.”

He handed over the ancient volume to her ; naturally, she was greatly interested. They began to discuss Nostradamus, one of the most famous seers in history. He was a doctor, of Jewish origin, who lived in France during the reign of Henri II ; the queen, Catherine, was especially interested in magic, and Michael Nostradamus was received at court. She found him too ambiguous in his prophecies, however.

Nevertheless, in 1555 he wrote a book of mystical prophecies, in doggerel verse. He claimed that the destinies of nations were detailed in his quatrains, but unfortunately few people even pretended to understand them because of their obscurity : however, they enjoyed great popularity, as prophecy invariably does.

Then one of them was tragically fulfilled. Nostradamus had written :

“ The young lion shall overcome the old one,
In martial field by a single duel,
In a golden cage he shall put out his eye,
Two wounds from one, then he shall die—a cruel death.” †

* *Nostradamus*, or *The Future Foretold*, by James Laver (Collins, 1942).

† The actual text reads :

“ Le lyon jeune le vieux surmontera
En champ bellique par singulier duelle :
Dans cage d'or les yeux luy crevera
Deux classes une, puis mourir, mort cruelle.”

In 1559, at a tournament, King Henri tilted horses with the Earl of Montgomery. The Earl's lance pierced the King's golden helmet, putting out his right eye, and inflicting a mortal wound : *another splinter penetrated his throat. Now the prophecy was understood—the young lion had killed the old.*

Since that day the writings of Nostradamus have been studied from a hundred angles. Some of his phrases are so obscure that a dozen meanings could be attributed to them. Many writers have claimed the key to his mind. A wide literature has been published concerning his prophecies.

Because of the ambiguity of his jingles, Nostradamus has probably been credited with far more successes than he deserved. It is a common jibe that some of his prophecies were only identified after the events had happened. Yet this is common form in prophecy ; man is not meant to know the future, for to do so would be bad for him. It is only after the event that the relevance of the prophecy appears. The idea behind this, according to prophets' claims, is that it proves that the future is ordained—that this world is part of a divine plan and that things do not happen by chance.

The same rule applies to Biblical prophecy. For example, the disciples did not realise that Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies until after the event.

Nostradamus included the usual general warnings about pestilences and wars. Yet some of his efforts were interesting, to say the least. Prophecies of wars and famines, in the 16th century and onwards, were reasonably safe, but some of his latter prognostications are more explicit—and startling in their accuracy. A dozen episodes in the reigns of the French House of Anjou were detailed years before they took place—including the Massacre of St. Bartholomew—and Nostradamus was well at home with the succeeding Bourbons. Sometimes, in amazing detail, the seer deals with unusual events. Two lines of one quatrain run :

*Neufve obturée au grand Montmorency,
Hors lieux prouvés delivré à clere peyne.*

In 1632 a revolt in the south of France was led by the illustrious Montmorency. It failed. His family tried to obtain his pardon, but the most they could secure was that Montmorency should be executed in private and not, as usual, in public.

This is exactly what Nostradamus suggests. *Obturée* means an enclosed space, and *hors lieux prouvés* "not in the approved or

usual place." The event was certainly out of the ordinary—and Nostradamus described it seventy years earlier! Yet there is more to come: *delivré à clere peyne* means "delivered to his clear or obvious doom." But Nostradamus continually introduces puns—and the name of Montmorency's executioner was Clerepeyne!

In British history, the prophet quite clearly points towards the execution of Charles I: has comments to make on Cromwell: foresees the greatness of the British Empire—at a time when it did not exist: and is unusually explicit about the Great Plague and Fire of London. In this latter case he even gives the date: in his deliberate ambiguous fashion he says that London will burn and its cathedral fall in *vingt trois les six*. He always missed out the hundreds, and if twenty-three-the-six is not very clear, three twenties and six are—the Fire of London took place in 1666.

Nostradamus was not the only one to forecast the French Revolution. Pierre Turrel, who died in 1531, actually gave its date at 1789, and 25 years for its term (Napoleon abdicated in 1814). Nostradamus made the date of the Revolution as 1792, not far out, as prophecies go. Yet the most remarkable of all his quatrains concern the flight of the French king. Varennes is actually mentioned by name—two hundred years before Louis was held up there!

Napoleon was well foreseen—even his birthplace, "near Italy." The Egyptian expedition, the gathering of the Grand Army at Boulogne (again mentioned by name), Trafalgar, Napoleon's divorce, Waterloo and St. Helena—all these can be readily identified without serious straining of the imagination.*

Luna was examining the book with great interest. It was a very old and rare edition, that published by Benoist Rigaud at Lyon in 1568. It contained the six first *Centuries* and forty-two quatrains of the seventh, followed by *Centuries VIII, IX and X*.

"You know, if anybody could tempt me to believe in prophecy, it would be Nostradamus," Lester chuckled. "At least he tempts the speculation that there must be something in it."

"I begin to see how you propose to use him if ever we get anywhere near Hitler."

* My own favourite story of Nostradamus is not to be found in his *Centuries* of quatrains. One evening he sat at his door, and the daughter of a neighbour passed on her way to the forest. She greeted him politely.

"*Bonjour, fillette*," he replied.

An hour later the girl returned.

"*Bonjour, petite femme*," said Nostradamus. D.B.

"Yes, the Führer will certainly know all about Nostradamus."

"Is it true that he refers to Hitler?" Luna asked. "My own copy is a later one—I have Bareste's commentary, but my edition of the *Centuries* is supposed to contain a lot of forgeries. I have seen a verse about Hitler quoted, but have never been able to trace it."

"There are two quatrains which refer to a man called Hister—perhaps that is as near as Nostradamus could get! After all, the Führer's name was once spelt Hiedler or Hüttler. Let me see if I can find them—I know approximately where they are. I wish Nostradamus had put his quatrains in correct order, instead of scattering his subjects all over the place. Ah, here it is—number 24 of the *Second Century*.

*Bestes farouches de faim fleuves tranner :
Plus part du champ encore Hister sera,
En cage de fer le grand fera treisner,
Quand rien enfant de Germain observera."*

"Translate it for me, brother. My French is not too good even when I face modern words, not this archaic doggerel."

"Beasts mad with hunger will make the streams tremble: Hister will be in control of an ever-growing territory; the great one will be dragged in a cage of iron, when the offspring of Germans observes no law."

"Well, I don't know which 'great one' is to be dragged in a cage of iron, but the rest of the verse fits Adolf well enough."

"Here's another—shall I translate it straight away?"

"Please."

"Liberty shall not be recovered. The control will be in the hands of a proud, wicked ruler of lowly origin, when the question of the bridge shall be opened, of Hister, at Venice, the republic will be angered."

"The question of the bridge—"

"That's Nostradamus' way of referring to the Pope—Pontifex Maximus. So the question of the bridge is presumably the Concordat between Mussolini and the Papacy in 1928. And France was not pleased! You notice the direct mention of Venice—where Hitler and Mussolini first met. In fact, from that meeting may date the loss of Italian liberty."

"That isn't bad—written nearly 400 years before it happened."

"No, and here's another which fits Mussolini: 'The great one will be born in the north of Italy, and will bear a very unworthy

surname : at Venice he will desire vengeance, but will himself be taken in a snare by a man clever at contriving ambushes.' " *

" Excellent ! And the unworthy surname ? "

" Well, Mussolini means muslin maker—honest enough, but not a grand name for a dictator. There are lots more like these—I must study them seriously. I can see great possibilities."

" So can I ! Especially as Hitler will already be converted."

" Yes. Ah, here's a popular one :

' Then an executioner shall be appointed
To carry out the sentence of justice
On a man bearing an illustrious name
But the unjust man will flee, escaping chastisement.'

That is commonly connected with the failure to ' hang the Kaiser ' in 1919. The last two lines fit—but nobody ever appointed the executioner. Yes, there are real possibilities here ! "

Lester's fundamental idea was sound. Since Hitler was known to dabble in astrology, he would not merely know something of Nostradamus, but would hold him in some respect. The risks were immense. If Hitler referred the volume to experts, they might find companion copies, old though the book was. It could only be used under certain well-defined limits : but, if these prevailed, the possibilities of the plan were boundless.

He turned away from the subject, however—this was planning very far ahead—and brought the conversation back to Captain Allenstein. He did not relish his interview with this gentleman, but it would not be policy to avoid it.

" I've been thinking," Luna commented. " I never know whether I believe in astrology or not. Sometimes I think that it is absurd, and then one of my ' messages from the stars ' proves incredibly accurate. But I must say this—that Allenstein's horoscope is no recommendation for astrology ! "

" What do you mean ? "

" His horoscope indicates that he ought to be everything that he is not," she said, smiling. " I don't see how you can possibly give it to him—he'd laugh."

" If he has a sense of humour ! "

* *Le grand naistra de Veronne et Vicence,
Qui portera un nurom bien indigne,
Qui a Venise voudra faire vengeance,
Luy mesme prins homme de guet et fine.*

"My information is that he has!"

"And he comes from a Junker family in East Prussia! Well, he's beaten his horoscope with a vengeance."

They chuckled: then sat quietly until midnight, their usual hour for retiring.

"Quickly to sleep," Lester advised. "This business is more wearing than we know."

It was easy to give advice which he could not take himself. The thought of Allenstein obsessed him: an instinctive apprehension which had served him well at more than one nervous moment.

The door of his bedroom opened: Luna advanced to his bed in the darkness.

"Brother, you are not asleep."

"No, I was thinking of——"

"I know. I, too, have been thinking of Allenstein. There is another explanation of this horoscope which does not fit."

CHAPTER NINE

"Go on, Luna."

"Suppose that he deliberately gave us false information, to expose us as frauds."

"Ah!"

"I am certain that you are right. Allenstein is a Gestapo spy. We must be very careful. Since Hess flew to England, Hitler has forbidden the public practice of astrology. I escaped because I am a fortune-teller—and have a powerful patroness. You escaped because you were useful to the Gestapo. But they are treacherous people. They collect evidence against everybody, so that they can produce it at the right moment. It would be tragedy if they interrupted us now."

"My God, yes! Look, Luna, is it possible to rake together any more information about Allenstein?"

"I'll try. Of course, I had never thought of him before—I had never seen him until the party last Sunday. All I know of him is from Frau Hoffmann's babblings."

"She might babble some more!"

"She shall! And there is one of the members of our under-

ground organisation—he may know something. I will telephone to him.”

“What—at this time of night?”

“He is a doctor. Hours mean nothing to him.”

He got out of bed and followed her to the telephone. Evidently she had come into his room on impulse, for she wore only her night-dress, without a dressing gown. Its long folds emphasised her shapely figure. Yet such details appeared far from her mind.

“That is Dr. Kraus?” she said, a few moments later.

“Yes.”

“This is Luna. I have those violent stomach pains again.”

“Ah! Get into bed. Apply a hot-water bottle, very hot, until I come.”

“The doctor and the priest used to be the only two men who had a universal passport,” she commented. “Now it is the doctor only.”

Lester revived the fire in the sitting room: they donned dressing gowns and awaited the doctor's coming.

“I'm afraid, my brother,” she whispered, after minutes of unbroken silence.

“There is no cause for fear,” he replied. “It may be a false alarm. We are living on our nerves and the slightest shock can upset us.”

“That horoscope! Never have I known one so completely false. There is something wrong.”

“Let us talk about something else. There is no sense in magnifying our fears. Let us reconstruct Europe after victory.”

No intelligent woman of Polish stock could resist such a bait: for a quarter of an hour they discussed earnestly the many desperate problems which await solution. Then the expected ring at the door bell.

“You go,” she said. “He may be followed—you never know.”

Lester admitted the doctor, an ordinary-looking little man, who greeted him warmly. He had heard from Luna something of the coming of Zodiuss, but had no details. Nor did he ask for any.

“Well, and how is my patient?” he asked, cheerily.

“Better already at the thought of your coming,” Luna replied.

“The pains have completely gone.”

“Nevertheless, I shall send you round some medicine. You look as if you need a tonic, anyway.”

Luna poured out the full story of their suspicion of Allenstein. Dr. Kraus listened gravely. All the while Lester marvelled at the

completeness and cleverness of the underground organisation: a doctor as a secret service agent was invaluable.

"No. I've seen this man, but I know nothing of him," Kraus said at length. "But I will find out."

"In the meantime, I'm supposed to be seeing him tomorrow," Lester exclaimed.

"Put him off."

"No. That would arouse his suspicion. But there is another method. Yes, I can deal with Allenstein—for the moment."

"How can you get at him?" Luna asked of Kraus.

"I was just wondering. We have one or two men planted in the garrison here. I may be able to pick up some details from them. I do not wish them to take risks, at this stage. They are too valuable in their present places. Now—wait a bit! I have another idea. I will keep it to myself—the less anybody knows of anybody else's business, the better. It may take a day or two to organise. So you must hold him off, at all costs."

"I will do that."

Kraus was a wise man. Like Lester, he saw that Luna's nerves were strained: their business settled, he turned the conversation abruptly, keeping it to Lester and himself. His control was admirable—not once did he ask a question about the activities and hopes of Zodius, the seer of Strasbourg. He was right: in underground activities secrecy is a first essential. The Communists in Germany used to organise themselves in cells of five, so that if one were caught, not more than four others would pay the price. The pattern was a good one.

For his part, Lester asked no questions. It was obvious that the Polish underground organisation was strong and extensive. There were nearly a million Poles in Germany before the war, and it had been easy to raise an active intelligence force among them. Nevertheless, the less he used it, the better he would be pleased. As he had already argued, it is not unknown for traitors to be deliberately planted in a patriot organisation. Even now he was somewhat concerned: Anna, and presumably her lover, and now Dr. Kraus—all these knew about the pseudo-Zodius. He trusted Luna's judgment implicitly, but hoped that the circle of knowledge need not be further widened.

He said nothing, but Luna's sensitive mind discerned his anxiety. Fervently she guaranteed the probity of her associates. Dr. Kraus had proved himself a dozen times over.

The following afternoon had been fixed for Captain Allenstein's interview with Zodius. Lester had carefully considered the line he should take and the subsequent scene was dramatic.

"There is your horoscope, Captain Allenstein," he exclaimed, without greeting, flinging the card down on the table.

"But I'm afraid that all these symbols are meaningless to me," said Allenstein, obviously puzzled.

"Of course. They have no meaning."

"But—I do not understand, Herr Professor."

"The stars cannot lie. Humans make mistakes in their interpretations of astral meanings, but the stars cannot lie. That is your horoscope, Captain Allenstein, on the basis of the information you gave to Luna. The deductions from it are utterly incorrect. Therefore, the information on which it was based is not true. In these matters, Captain Allenstein, absolute accuracy is essential: also, confidence, as between a patient and his doctor. If you have no confidence in me, the matter is ended. But do not try to deceive me. If you need my advice, I will receive you on this day week at the same hour."

Allenstein turned away. Then Zodius called him back.

"One more word. You, too, are threatened, as the child of Frau Hoffmann was threatened, by a sudden danger within the next few days."

"What do you mean? How do you know?"

"You could never understand the means by which I know. Your sphere is the active, not the mystic; you live in the will and not in the astral self. I would not doubt your judgment on some matter of military command, and I suggest you would now be well-advised to show some regard for mine. I can say no more without your horoscope, and of that I have been deprived by your own act. All that I know is that a danger threatens you: but I think that it will spare your life."

"Nonsense. You cannot threaten me!"

"I do not threaten, I warn. When the peril has descended—and gone—then perhaps you will no longer regard me as a charlatan. Until then, Captain Allenstein, there is nothing for you that I can do."

Before the astonished Allenstein could appreciate what was happening Zodius had vanished. His personality, always forceful, was heightened by his anger. Allenstein waited for a minute or two, as if expecting the seer to return: then he, too, went out.

Maybe he was still thinking of the unusual scene as he walked along the streets : or it may have been the natural arrogance of the Prussian officer. Certainly he was not looking carefully as he crossed the Tauentzienstrasse, on his way back to the Schloss. The driver of a motor lorry made a desperate effort to avoid him : he did manage to evade a direct hit, but his rear mudguard caught Allenstein's waist, flinging him to the ground.

The inevitable crowd gathered. An ordinary-looking little man pushed his way through importantly.

"I am a doctor—make way ! " he called out.

A policeman imperiously forced a passage through the crowd. Allenstein lay in the gutter, apparently stunned. The doctor made a hurried examination.

"Hospital—at once ! " he said to the policeman.

An ambulance soon arrived, and the doctor accompanied it to the hospital. There, with the house surgeon, he examined Allenstein, who was now conscious. The surgeon, only just out of his student days, was very glad to have the advice of the more experienced practitioner—a captain of the general staff was a most important patient.

Experienced hands ripped off Allenstein's clothes : sensitive fingers wandered over his body.

"Nothing serious, I think," the doctor said at length : the house surgeon nodded professional agreement. "The abrasions are all superficial, and you will have some bruises. But we must make sure—an X-ray examination is advisable. You ought to stay in hospital at least for the night."

Alenstein was in no condition to argue, for he still felt dazed. He did ask that the accident should be reported to General Hoffmann's Chief of Staff. This, of course, the house surgeon undertook to do. The doctor prepared to take his leave. "These healthy he-men take more than they realise," he said. "The man has had a serious shock. There may be reactions later. I should give him a strong sedative tonight. I will 'phone up later to see how he is getting on."

This promise he fulfilled, to learn that the patient was well asleep following the taking of a sedative. Thus it came about that a German orderly hearing of Captain Allenstein's enforced absence seized the opportunity to give a thorough cleaning to his room. His methods of cleansing might have amazed a charlady, but at least he had bucket and brush close at hand as an alibi while, a few minutes at a time, he examined Allenstein's clothes and papers.

The following morning Dr. Kraus called on his patient, Luna. Her stomach pains had been greatly eased by the medicine he had sent, he learned—she pointed to the half-empty bottle. Her friend, Professor Zodiuss, thought highly of the doctor's professional skill.

After a moment of light comedy, Dr. Kraus broke into his news, which was startling. Allenstein's army kit was normal enough—a captain of the General Staff carries more than an officer of a combat regiment, but there was nothing unusual about it. His private papers were scanty, but he appeared to be a reader of discernment: maybe because he had been stationed at Breslau for some time he had accumulated a library in miniature: some books were of recent issue, others classics. Allenstein signed his name on the blank page of each, just inside the cover, together with the date of purchase. The orderly replaced them on their selves, dusting them as he did so. Then he proceeded to do a little mopping before spending a few additional moments in the pockets of the captain's spare uniforms—there is always the prospect of a forgotten trifle. It was instinct rather than calculation, he emphasised later, which made him return to the bookshelves.

Now he began to examine the books more carefully. Their titles had no significance, except that their owner was a serious reader. There was no odd slip of paper inside a book. Then, in a flash, the orderly knew that he had found what he sought. In his hand was a copy of Winston Churchill's "World Crisis, 1911-14": its date of purchase was 1926. Excitedly, the orderly picked up a more modern book, by another English author—Bernard Newman's "The Cavalry Went Through." Now he was exultant: he was not without experience, and he was confident that the *two signatures had not been written by the same hand*.

"But what does that mean?" Luna demanded.

"It means that Allenstein is not Allenstein," said Lester.

"That would explain the incorrect horoscope—but it does not explain anything else. Not to me, anyway," she added.

"It is all very confusing," Lester admitted. "It confirms our suspicions—that there is something very fishy about Allenstein. But I don't see very much further ahead. What about you, Dr. Kraus?"

"I can only suggest this, Herr Professor. I agree that the evidence suggests that Allenstein is not Allenstein. The only theory I can offer is this: the Gestapo are desperately anxious to have agents within the General Staff—we know that. They know

that the military chiefs can seize power in Germany at any moment they wish, so the Gestapo spies upon them continuously. Yet the German General Staff is a closed clique, almost a family: its members despise the Nazis, and merely use them. I cannot imagine any staff officer selling himself to the Gestapo. Therefore Himmler has had to plant his agents by more melodramatic methods—by eliminating a real officer and putting in a substitute. That is my theory."

They agreed that it fitted and covered all facts, down to Allenstein's visits to Luna and Zodius. Yet, although Dr. Kraus' diagnosis might be accurate, he could not prescribe a cure. Of course, Allenstein could easily be removed, he suggested.

Lester demurred: not that he had any moral objection, but because there was always the possibility that his disappearance or death might be traced to his association with Zodius. In an emergency, drastic action might be necessary, but it was best avoided. The nearer their plan remained to normal conduct, the firmer their foundation and the better their prospect of success. Moreover, they now knew who their enemy was. But if he failed, then the Gestapo might appoint someone else, whose technique would be more subtle and therefore more dangerous.

The question was postponed until Allenstein's next visit. Now that Lester knew something about his client—and that without Allenstein's knowledge—he might be able to use the interview to his advantage.

The following day Frau Hoffman arrived at the flat in great excitement. Greeting Luna warmly, she insisted on seeing Zodius.

"Oh, Herr Professor," she cried, almost uncontrolled. "At last! My husband has always laughed at me, but your wonderful prevision has changed his ideas. He wants to see you—primarily to thank you, but I have persuaded him to consult you as well. He is very worried—there is a party of Polish guerrillas in Eastern Silesia which has given him a lot of trouble. At last he said, 'Well, it can't do any harm.' I am delighted. I am sure you can help him, Herr Professor. And for myself——"

She rambled on loquaciously. Lester saw how easy it was for Luna to handle such clients—the woman could be persuaded to give away everything she knew without realising it. Casually he brought the conversation back to the Polish guerrillas, then away back to Frau Hoffman's family.

"This is galling," he said, bitterly, after she had left. "Our

careful planning has brought us to the moment of our big chance, and now this Allenstein man comes in to complicate the issue."

"Maybe Kraus was right," Luna whispered. "Perhaps he will have to have a more serious accident."

"I don't like it."

"No. But it may be essential."

"Tell me about these guerrillas."

"I will find out which particular band is involved. There are lots of them, especially in the mountains. Some of them wage defensive actions only—they are saving themselves for the day when the Allied armies will be approaching Poland. Others harass the Germans wherever they can—shooting up posts, sabotaging communications, and so on. It sounds as if one of these bands has been troubling the Great Man. I can easily check up on this—and it ought to be easy to work out a good scheme. Oh, it is damnable—the chance we prayed for, under perfect conditions, and all upset by Allenstein!"

In the following days Lester had to admit that Allenstein had fairly got on his nerves. The man's personality was peculiar: he had an air of quiet competence—which belied his quest for advice from fortune-tellers. And the information gleaned by the military orderly was very disconcerting.

Alenstein was to call on the Tuesday—despite the uncertainty of their last conversation, Lester did not doubt that his client would return as directed: obviously Alenstein was after something. Lester admitted that the prospective visit troubled him much more acutely than the interview with General Hoffmann on the following evening.

Sure enough, the adjutant arrived to time. Lester did not pretend to like the half-smile which played about the corners of his visitor's lips. He braced himself to intense mental effort: here was no empty-headed, loquacious woman, but a keen and intelligent mind.

"I'm sorry if I offended you last week, Professor Zodius," Alenstein began.

"You offended my craft, not me. I did not ask you to come. You sought me, not I you. I am not infallible. My science is only six thousand years old. It cannot advance as rapidly as yours, Captain Alenstein, for it seeks the good of man, not his destruction. Astrology is still a child among human ideas, and I am only a humble practitioner. Yet, despite my errors, I can often help those

in doubt. But only if they are absolutely frank with me. No science can be based upon a lie. Thus, if you must consult me, do not attempt to cheat me. I say again, I did not seek you out: you came to me."

Allenstein regarded Zodiuss in some admiration. Whatever the visitor's motives, he found the dignity of the astrologer very impressive.

"I have apologised, and I meant it, Professor Zodiuss," he said, quietly. "Your reproaches last week were so well deserved that I left before I had said what I came to say. Yet it was better postponed, as it happens. You are seeing General Hoffmann tomorrow, I believe?"

"I do not discuss the affairs of my clients!" Zodiuss exclaimed, stiffly.

"Of course not—normally. I quite understand that, Professor Zodiuss. But I am especially anxious to know what you propose to say to my commanding officer tomorrow, *Captain Lester!*"

CHAPTER TEN

ALTHOUGH keyed up to a pitch of keen concentration, Lester was staggered. He had visualised Allenstein as a Gestapo agent, but had no suspicion that his own identity was known.

The moment called for drastic action. Now Lester bitterly regretted that he had not taken the advice of Dr. Kraus! For the moment he must fight for time.

"I do not understand, Captain Allenstein," he said coldly. But the sarcastic smile of his visitor showed that no bluff was likely to succeed.

"I think you do, Captain Lester! And, indeed, I congratulate you. This impersonation is magnificent—for the moment I was almost deceived. And the way you carry it off—the stage lost a potential genius when you took up secret service work, Captain Lester."

"Wait! Stand still!" The sudden interruption intensified the drama of the moment. Luna stood in the doorway, an automatic in her hand. "Put your hands behind your head, Captain Allenstein!"

Allenstein, obviously startled, obeyed. Luna advanced and stood beside Lester.

"We must not kill him here," she said, "but certainly he must die."

"Just a minute," Lester whispered. "If he knows, others may know too."

"No one else knows!" Allenstein commented.

The man was amazingly calm now that he had recovered from the surprise of Luna's appearance. Lester was completely puzzled—why should this fellow admit that no one else knew, and thereby condemn himself to death? Before he could find the answer to his own query, Allenstein spoke again.

"You may put down that automatic, Fraulein Luna. I know who you are, Captain Lester, though I confess that I would never have found it out for myself. My people told me——"

"The Gestapo!" Luna exclaimed.

"No, not the Gestapo. My people had word from Colonel Metcalfe in London——"

"Wait!" cried Lester. "Tell me—does this mean that you are Russian?"

"Of course!" Allenstein's eyes were twinkling. "Your stars were right when they told you that the particulars I gave you were not my own—they belonged to a German officer whose identity I have borrowed."

Lester's brain was trained to rapid action. He recalled now that Metcalfe had mentioned that the Russians must be informed, as the direct benefit might accrue to them more rapidly than to us. Presumably it had not been possible to warn Lester of the near presence of an ally. Yes, Allenstein's claim would explain a lot. But if it were false——

Evidently Luna's mind worked along the same lines. After a moment's hesitation she laid the automatic on the desk and faced Allenstein, staring into his eyes.

"This man is speaking the truth, brother," she said simply. Then she addressed Allenstein in a torrent of Polish. He replied, in Russian. Both languages are derived from common Slav roots and in spite of minor differences Poles and Russians can converse without great difficulty.

"There is no doubt," she announced firmly. "I am convinced."

Now Lester grasped the hand which Allenstein held out to him. Then, almost overcome at the abrupt drop in tension, he subsided

into a chair. One moment he had confronted a supposed deadly enemy : now he was presented with an ally.

After a moment of strained silence, tongues wagged freely. Questions poured from Allenstein. Lester had done a remarkable job in impersonating an Alsatian astrologer, but Allenstein's feat in taking the place of a German staff officer was even more remarkable.

"There was a real Allenstein, I suppose?" Lester queried.

"Oh, yes. He was one of the German officers sent to Russia on a liaison mission. You remember that, after their defeat in 1918, the German General Staff was furious because its army was reduced to a mere 100,000 men. Of course, it used this force as a cadre, so that every man was capable of becoming a commissioned or non-commissioned officer in the moment of expansion. But at the same time the Germans needed to get experience in the handling of large bodies of men and modern weapons. At that time the new Russian army was very short of instructors, so a considerable number of young German officers with technical experience were engaged. Allenstein was one of them. He was in Russia for five years, so it was easy to study him over a long period."

"I see. And why did your people select him for—er—special service?"

"Because he had no very near relatives and because a Russian officer resembled him fairly closely."

"Where is he now?"

"In heaven or hell, according to his conduct on earth and his religious beliefs, if any."

"And when did the substitution take place?" Lester asked.

"In 1928."

"1928! Gosh, your people looked ahead. That was long before Hitler became Chancellor."

"Yes. Hitler has scarcely affected German foreign policy. We were always quite certain that one day we should be attacked."

"But—,"

"I know what you are thinking, Captain Lester. Why did we make the pact with Hitler in 1939? I think we can say at this stage that it was a mistake. Germany is not the only place where military ideas differ sometimes from political plans. Some of our people believed that it would be better to let Germany exhaust herself against Britain and France—they could not credit our agents' reports of the weakness of France. You must remember, Captain Lester, that we had only to consider the security of Russia and not

the welfare of Britain and France, to whom we owed nothing. So we made our decision in our own interest. It was wrong, and we have had to pay the price—a very heavy price. However, we can discuss these interesting points at our leisure. For the moment, we had better concentrate on practical business. I am instructed to collaborate with you to the fullest possible extent, and naturally I should be happy to do so. So I return to my first question; what do you propose to say to my commanding officer tomorrow—Professor Zodius?”

Lester smiled in appreciation. Allenstein had a pretty wit: more than that, he must be a man of courage and resource, to hold down an impersonation for fifteen years. True, as he had said, there had been unusual opportunities for the prolonged observation of his quarry, but the strain of the long years must have been heavy. Allenstein carried it lightly, however; by this time, naturally, he would be above suspicion in his character, but there were always dangers along his lines of communication, always the weakest link in the espionage chain.

“Ah, General Hoffmann tomorrow!” said Lester. “Right. First of all, tell us what you know about these Polish guerrillas who are causing trouble in the foothills of the Tatra Mountains.”

“What—you know about them?” Allenstein was obviously surprised.

“Quite a lot—but I can’t know too much, for I propose to discuss the subject with the general tomorrow.”

Rapidly Allenstein sketched in the details of the rather garbled account given by Frau Hoffmann.

“And now I must go,” Allenstein announced. “The great Zodius could never spare me more than half an hour—and we never know who may be watching. I must say, Captain Lester, that this is the most original scheme I ever encountered.”

When he had gone, Lester and Luna sat quietly, almost as if exhausted. It is indeed fatiguing, when a dramatic climax resolves itself into comedy. Yet Lester’s brain was too active: in the light of the new knowledge, he was already planning ahead.

A client arrived for Luna: final decisions were postponed until the evening.

Their task promised to be no easy one. It might be that Hoffmann, in an unguarded moment, had promised to see this magician who had saved his son’s life. But maybe he merely wanted to thank him! Or to humour his wife! Was it likely that a German

general would consult an astrologer about his own affairs? Lester queried.

"Hitler does," Luna said, softly. "Doubtless Hoffmann knows that—everybody does. It seems to me that he is convinced against himself that there is something in the business. He wants to see you: if he likes the look of you, then he may confide in you: if not—but he will."

There was no party at the Hoffmann mansion the following evening. Whatever the general's beliefs or doubts, obviously he did not intend to parade them in public! On their arrival, Luna was carried off into Frau Hoffmann's drawing-room, but Zodiuss was shown into the general's study.

He took stock of his man during the formal greetings. Already, from Luna and Allenstein, he had the impression of a man not really big enough for his job, but who had advanced largely on the great military name he bore.

"I wanted to thank you—my wife told me about this business," the general began, both his words and sentences clipped short. "I don't profess to know—it is all very remarkable."

He was looking keenly at the striking figure in front of him: never had the personality of Zodiuss been so commanding and masterful.

"It was interesting to me, and I was grateful of the opportunity, Herr General. Astrology is an ancient science, firmly based, but I have been experimenting in certain new phases. So far I am only in the elementary stages. Your wife happened to offer to me a unique opportunity of experiment, and my method was a success. To me that proves nothing: I have not yet convinced myself. Experience is the foundation of astrology, and my experience in the new fields I explore is still narrow. And the fields are wide. Indeed, I am groping."

"You are frank, Professor Zodiuss."

"Why should I be otherwise, with you? I grope, but I believe that I shall find something. One day the case of your son will go into scientific annals. This is the comparison: when you advance against your enemy, you send forward your patrols, to probe the enemy's position and strength. From the resultant clashes you draw your conclusions. My experiment last week was one of my patrols: from its clash I have learned much—but I still must send out many more patrols. Yet this is important: your patrols are your experimental moves: all the time you have behind you your

army, known, solid and tried. So I make my experiments, Herr General, but all the time I have behind me the lore of the stars, known, solid and tried."

"You really believe in this astrology business?" Obviously Zodius' frankness about his "experiments" had made the right impression.

"Nothing but belief is possible to the student, Herr General. Astrology is a science. It is not yet exact, for its observations require long periods of time—the planet Pluto occupies 256 years in its travels round its orbit. So we are still learning, and sometimes make mistakes. Yet much is known—there is a firm background of real knowledge. It is like military science, Herr General. You confront a Russian opponent: you have been carefully trained—not only in German methods of war, but in Russian. Thus when your Intelligence service reports that he is advancing along a certain line with so many men, you have a good idea of what he will do, and take your counter-measures. In most cases these are effective. But at the last minute something may have happened in the Russian commander's camp—he may have a new chief of staff with fresh ideas, or a secret weapon may be available. Then your precautions are not correct for the occasion. Thus it is with astrology. We *know* that tendencies are influenced by the stars. But three of the planets have only been discovered within the last century and a half, so that our knowledge of their effects is still rudimentary. On the other hand, the influences of the moon have been studied for six thousand years, and on that basis of knowledge we can scarcely go wrong. It is an age-old tradition, for example, that new ventures should always be started at New Moon or during the moon's increase. This was a principle determined by wide study of the fate of new ventures. Evidently the Führer needs no persuasion as to the power of the New Moon."

"What do you mean?"

"He *always* launches his new ventures at the right time. Take the year 1940, for example. On April 7th there was a New Moon: two days later we invaded Norway and Denmark. Next New Moon was on May 10th—and we marched into Holland and Belgium at the exact moment. Then June 6th—and Italy entered the war on the 8th. July 5th—and on that day we persuaded the French Government to break off relations with Britain. August 3rd—five days later we opened the aerial attack on Britain. So I might go on. Mussolini would have done well to imitate the Führer's method.

He launched his attack on Greece on October 28th—two days *before* the New Moon."

This somewhat superficial argument appeared to impress General Hoffmann considerably.

"I understand that my wife some time ago asked Frau Luna to cast my horoscope. It was done without my knowledge—but it appears to be reasonably accurate."

As it was flattering and based upon Frau Hoffmann's irresponsible chatter, this was scarcely surprising.

"I take it that a code of conduct governs all your proceedings?" the general went on, rather uneasily. Whatever the Führer did, he knew very well that astrology was not a common weakness among German generals.

"Ours is the secrecy of the confessional," Zodius assured him.

"I admit to some concern, Herr Professor. I am in charge of Number VII District, which now covers the whole of Silesia. My principal tasks are two in number. First, provision and training of reserve formations for the eastern front; this, I can say, has been satisfactorily accomplished, and I have received many commendations. Second, the maintenance of order in the Polish territories incorporated in the Reich. Here I have been only partially successful. There are some guerrillas—one band in particular—they have caused a lot of trouble in disrupting communications. There cannot be many men involved—which makes General Headquarters all the more sarcastic in their references."

Zodius could picture this very well! Now the scene was playing exactly as anticipated.

"So I have decided to enlist your help—privately," Hoffmann went on. "You can help me—and the Fatherland, of course."

"I hope so, Herr General. I gather that you seek my aid to trace this guerrilla band?"

"That is so."

"Very well. I am at your service. But first I must have information. I cannot trace the band of men from your stars, but only from theirs."

"I had thought of that, naturally. We know their leader—his name is Boleslas Grynski. Here are full details of his date and place of birth."

"This is excellent, Herr General!" Zodius commented warmly; "you have even inserted the hour of birth."

"We hold Grynski's mother as hostage, so it is easy to obtain such

details. Indeed, after your—er—rather personal experiment with my wife last week, my deputy at Krakow has even obtained such details as he could from Grynski's mother about the probable date of conception. There are two possible dates—that is the nearest evidence she could offer. I have also the place and date of birth of his father and mother, if they will help."

"Magnificent! Now we can set to work. In her bag, Frau Luna has brought some of our records. The correct ephemeris will be among them. Will you please send for her?"

"Instead, we will join them."

They walked along to the drawing-room, where Frau Hoffmann was talking as irrepressibly as ever. She sprang up as she saw Zodius.

"Well, have you——"

"We have scarcely begun, dear lady," he said gently. "Will you please sit down, both of you, while we work? It may take some time. Please excuse us."

On the ample basis of Hoffmann's notes, Luna began to cast the necessary horoscopes.

"I will join her in a moment," Zodius commented. "She is very quick at preparing the basis of the horoscope."

"This theory of yours—about conceptional horoscopes—I have never heard of it before," said Hoffmann.

"It is not entirely new, as I explained to Frau Hoffmann, but has never been scientifically studied. The Greeks knew something about it. You will recall one of their theories of eugenic breeding? It is developed in Plato's *Republic*. Here, discussing the rearing of a race of Guardians who should stand in the same relation to their city as the Herrenvolk do the subject races, he laid stress on the correct time being chosen for their conception. The instructions are obscure, but they undoubtedly have an astrological basis. And when his city begins to degenerate, he shows that this is due to the conception not taking place at the proper time."

("I only hope the General doesn't turn up *The Republic*," he remarked afterwards to Luna. "He would get a shock to find Plato's description of a dictatorship as being the last resort of a state which goes thoroughly to the bad. To say nothing of his adverse opinion, written two thousand years ahead, of the exploits and character of someone who might be mistaken for the Führer himself.")

"Yes, I do recall something to that effect," Hoffmann agreed.

"The Greek method was rather elementary. They used to get young men and women, of first-class mental and physical categories, and set them dancing in a field, naked. This ceremony was always held in the morning. Just before noon the dancers would pair off into couples, so that conception might be accomplished just as the sun was at its meridian."

"You ought to tell Schirach * about that, Herr Professor. He is always looking for new ideas."

"And now, excuse me, Herr General. I will join my sister. We will examine the horoscopes." He sat down and peered earnestly and anxiously at the sheets in front of him.

"There are contradictions here," Zodiuss muttered, as he studied the natal horoscope and the two covering the probable dates of conception. "No wonder the man became a rebel with such conflicting influences."

"Can you tell——" Frau Hoffmann broke in.

"Silence, dear lady!" Zodiuss warned. "You may listen, but you must not interrupt. My sister and I need the most intense concentration."

Remembering the dramatic scene of the previous week, Frau Hoffmann evidently expected something of a repetition. But Zodiuss was far too astute for that: the theatrical method which had impressed a feminine nit-wit would not be likely to appeal to a German general, however weak he might be. On this occasion the astrologer proposed to rely entirely on his science—or on his interpretation of it.

Now Luna took up the process of muttered comment. "Aries is the sign on the first date, Leo on the second. Brain and heart—what a contest! But Mars is in the ascendant on both."

"There is Taurus in trine to Mars," Zodiuss pointed out. "The close orbs are in bad aspect. The Moon is in Aries. You note, sister, that the first conceptional horoscope agrees with the natal horoscope much more closely than the second?"

"Yes, brother. And with the indications in his mother's horoscope. By all the signs, she was dominant at the moment of conception."

"Let us work back from the birth-date to ascertain the actual moment of impregnation. Subtract ten moons. That is four days after the first conceptional date."

* Baldur von Schirach, Leader of the German Youth Movement. (Reichsjugendführer.)

"That is quite possible, physically?"

"Of course. Work out the horoscope for that date."

Zodius leaned back in his chair as if very weary, while the delicate fingers of Luna sketched the astrologic shorthand on the prepared circle.

"That is interesting!" she whispered.

"Ah!"

"It agrees in the main essentials with the natal horoscope and with that of the first conceptional date. We are on the track."

"Assuredly. Now we are on firm ground, we can check on our calculations. Tell me, Herr General, have you a description of this man Grynski?"

"Yes. In great detail."

"Very well. We shall describe the man as he should be if the first conceptional date is correct. If you can confirm our description then our firm basis is established, and we can get on."

Frau Hoffmann was staring at them with wide-open eyes: nor did her husband conceal his interest in the maze of hieroglyphics over which the two seers pondered. It is always fascinating to see how the other man goes to work.

"He should be tall," Luna began, after a dramatic silence.

"Certainly above the average. In his features he will resemble his mother rather than his father—you note the position of Scorpio, brother?"

"Yes. I see the man as hairy——"

"Fair hair—almost Nordic."

"Yes. There will be hair on his body, too. On his chest and legs."

"Gemini is powerful, brother. The man will be strong of hand and arm——"

"Not strong, sister. Gemini is countered by Aries, ruling the brain. I should say that the man is very expressive with his hands, and uses them freely as he speaks."

"The Moon is in Aries. I can see the man fussy about his food, appreciating delicate dishes rather than substantial meals. The angles are not beneficent, brother."

"No. This is a man of many opinions and rapid changes. His heart fights his brain, and emotion may triumph over common sense. He——"

"I turn back to Aries, brother. The ruling planet is Mars. See here its position in the House. This man will talk too much——"

General Hoffmann could be restrained no longer. His eyes were now as wondering as those of his wife.

"But this is amazing, Herr Professor!" he cried. "And you, Frau Luna! I could not have described the man better from all the police records! He *does* talk too much—and he does change his opinions. At college he was a socialist, but now he is a nationalist. He is a fluent agitator, and gesticulates with his hands. He is tall and fair and hairy. Why——" the general was obviously and completely overcome.

Zodius judged it opportune to use the moment immediately, before its effect should fade.

"This is a good beginning," he announced, calmly. "Now at least we know that our basis is sound, which I said was our first essential. Very well, Herr General, now we are prepared to begin work. Tell me your problem."

"I want to catch this man."

"You do not know where he is?"

"No. If I did, I could catch him. He has a hide-out somewhere."

"I see. Very well. I will try. But I have explained the limitations, Herr General. I am no quack magician. I cannot say to you that the man is hiding at No. 22, Wawelstrasse, Krakow. That is fantastic. I can only suggest influences. I can suggest the indications of what the man would do—just as you can suggest what your Russian opponent would do. But there may be unseen influences—like the secret weapons I suggested——" Zodius broke off abruptly. General Hoffmann was scarcely listening: he was already converted to the wonders of astrology. "Tell me, Herr General, where was this man last seen?"

"At Nowy Targ, last Sunday. He and his men placed a bomb in the goods station, and escaped."

"Very well. Let us study the stars for last Sunday. What time was the man seen?"

"He shot his way out of the station just after dark—about 6 p.m."

"And where is Nowy Targ?"

Zodius and Luna set to work again. This time not even Frau Hoffmann attempted to interrupt: without any extravagant building up, the atmosphere was tense and dramatic.

"Conflict again," Luna whispered, surveying the astrological signs Zodius was scattering on the paper. "Even the dominant colours clash. Black and white——"

"Two rivers join at Nowy Targ," Hoffmann broke in excitedly—"the Black and the White Dunajec."

"The influence is to the south," Zodus murmured, ignoring the interruption.

"That is the valley of the White Dunajec——"

A sudden glance from Zodus quietened him. Again the astrologers turned to their pages.

"We must allow for the passing hours," Zodus said. "We cannot know exactly, but we can estimate. Until midnight the course is fairly clear—the influence is to the south continuously."

"Note the power of the earth as the moon recedes, brother!"

"I have not overlooked it, sister. That usually means mountains. After midnight the influence of Mars is strong—now to the east."

The colours are a maze," she whispered. "They change so frequently—they merge, forming white."

"The Valley of White Water!" the general hissed.

"The power of the earth is now dominant. He is surrounded by mountains, I should estimate. He enters the sign of Scorpio——"

"Fixed water!"

"But at sextile, Pisces. This is strange, sister. There are many scholars who say that the ruling planet of Pisces is not Jupiter, but Neptune. Certainly it is intimately concerned with the sea. But this is absurd. We have gone south from Nowy Targ, then east. We are among mountains. We find fixed water—and now we suggest the sea. Let us check our calculations, sister. When the stars lead us to absurdity, then it is the mortals who err. We must have made some error—we will begin again."

"No need to do that, Herr Professor," General Hoffmann was beaming.

"But it is essential. Our first results were so promising, but now they lead to this paradox."

"No paradox! On the contrary, you have solved my problem."

"What? But——"

"You probably do not know this Polish region, Professor Zodus—it is very far from Alsace. I know it well. Twenty miles south of Nowy Targ is the holiday resort of Zakopane, on the edge of the Tatra Mountains. Another twenty miles east is the little lake of Morskie Oko. That answers your description exactly."

"But there is the sea—a very definite influence."

"The Polish words 'Morskie Oko' mean 'The Eye of the Sea,'"

Hoffmann announced triumphantly. "There is a local legend that the lake is connected with the sea, hundreds of miles away, by an underground channel. Hence the name."

"Ah!" Zodiuss was relieved to find that the weakest point in his narrative had been accepted so auspiciously. "I do not think that we can go further, Herr General. We do not know the time factor. If he waited a day at this lake, it would put all further calculations awry."

"The Moon is in the final stage of the descendant, brother. There is the suggestion of habit—of no change."

"You are right, sister. General Hoffmann, that is all that we can tell you. I warned you that ours is not yet an exact science. But I do suggest that you search for this man near this lake—what was it called?"

"Morskie Oko."

"Yes. On the information you gave to us, the trail as far as there is reasonably clear. I can guarantee no more."

"I ask for no more, Herr Professor. This is beyond my wildest dreams. And if you are right——" his warm tone promised much.

"I feel that I am right, I always know when I am right. But now I am tired. Sister, will you take me home?"

He dismissed Frau Hoffmann's pleadings to stay for a meal: he knew exactly how to deal with her type.

Zodiuss and Luna had donned their cloaks and were standing in the hall.

"One final point, Herr General," he said. "Do not be too hurried. It would be best to await the New Moon."

"Oh!" Hoffmann was obviously disappointed: the man of action always wants to get to work at once.

"You have only two days to wait. I advise it."

"Very well, Herr Professor." The general was almost humble. He was not less effusive in his thanks than his wife.

Luna clung to Zodiuss as they approached the flat, exulting in their success. As he opened the door, Zodiuss halted abruptly.

"Some one is here," he whispered, for a streak of light showed under the living-room door. "Surely not Allenstein?"

He advanced boldly and flung open the door. A man sat dozing by the fire, to awake with a start as Zodiuss entered.

"Ah!" said Luna, cheerfully. "Here is a man you wanted to know. Brother, meet an old friend of mine, Boleslas Grynski."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LESTER stared at the patriot leader, then advanced with outstretched hand.

"I must say," he commented, "that we have just given a most accurate description of you to General Hoffmann."

"Even to the hair on your chest!" Luna smiled. "I should add, brother, that I used to go swimming with Boleslas—hence my rather intimate acquaintance with his peculiarities."

Grynski was a fine figure of a man: only his eyes were abnormal—when he was roused, they flashed fiercely, like those of a fanatic. He had already suffered for his country, but his courage shone from every glance and gesture.

"Well, have you fixed up my capture or death?" Grynski asked cheerfully.

"Yes. You have two more days to live," Luna assured him lightheartedly.

"Excellent. What more can a man want—two whole days of life?"

"Seriously, my friend, I assume that you have made all your arrangements?" Zodiacus asked.

"Of course, Herr Professor." (Grynski used this form of address throughout—indeed, he did not know the real identity of Zodiacus. The secret was kept even from intimate associates. The good conspirator never asks to know too much: torture can be a severe tempter, even to a brave man.) "The Germans will advance towards the lake of Morskie Oko, as I arranged with Luna. My outposts will engage them, and will kill a few before retiring. I shall have a small rearguard in the cave above the lake, which has been fitted up as a guerrilla headquarters. While it holds up the German detachment, the rest of us will escape over the mountains on the Czechoslovakian border, abandoning such part of our equipment as we do not need. We have another hide-out thirty miles east. It is a simple plan, but should be effective."

"What of the rearguard?" Luna asked anxiously.

"They will probably die," he answered calmly. "It is the fate of men, and we are desperate. They will exact a heavy price, have no fear."

"Oh, I hate the thought——"

"Luna, you have told me something of your plan. Its impor-

tance is profound. Our contribution is very small. It is vital that Hoffmann should be convinced. If he merely finds an empty cave, he may suspect trickery or treachery. But if he finds the guerrillas he seeks, then Zodius has justified himself. It is not the fault of the astrologer that the Germans fail to net their prey—he only undertook to tell them where to find it."

"He is right, sister," said Zodius slowly. "There must be no suggestion of fake."

"But those men—to die!"

"You and I face death every moment," he pointed out.

"It is easier to face your own death than to send other people to theirs," she whispered. "Nevertheless, I understand—it is inevitable."

"There is nothing further you want me to do?" Grynski asked. "If I may, I will rest for a few hours, then get off into the hills before dawn."

Lester regarded the man with admiration. Here was a patriot of the highest type, a man who had made a deliberate decision, and had chosen the hard way. He would willingly have talked through the night with Grynski, but realised that rest was vital—to himself as well as to the guerrilla leader.

Nevertheless, the strain of the following days was almost intolerable. So much was at stake. Allenstein called in to say that the anticipated operations had been ordered, and that Hoffmann was giving to them his own special attention. Apparently his reproof from General Headquarters had been severe, and he was obviously anxious for results.

On the third evening Allenstein came again. "I'm here officially this time," he explained. "The general's car is outside—he wishes to see Professor Zodius and Frau Luna as soon as is convenient. I may say that he has very pleasant news for you."

There was no question about that. Hoffmann was beaming, and his wife was almost hysterical.

"An overwhelming success," the general reported. "We have captured the guerrilla headquarters and all their material. Four of their men were killed and the rest scattered in disorder. We shall round them up—the organisation of the band is broken."

Lester pondered that the hard and efficient German General Staff would not regard anything short of the complete annihilation of the band as "an overwhelming success." But naturally he made no comment!

"Did we suffer any losses ourselves?" Luna asked.

"About thirty, killed and wounded. But casualties are inevitable in operations. They are the affair of soldiers. The point is that your part in the scheme was a hundred per cent. successful—your experiments proved themselves beyond any shadow of doubt, Professor Zodius. Indeed, I am wondering how your remarkable skill can be further applied to the service of the Fatherland."

"I shall do all I can, naturally, Herr General. But, you understand, it will not always be possible. On this occasion the circumstances were propitious, and the information you provided was remarkably complete. It may be——"

"There is no need for excuses, Herr Professor. I quite understand the position. No man is always successful. But I am convinced that you are a master of your science and that you can be used. I am only wondering about my next line of approach."

Lester could have suggested it with the greatest of ease! But it was vital that the idea should appear to come from the other side.

"It is my duty to report on these events to my supervisor," Hoffmann went on. "Yet von Brauschitsch is notoriously unresponsive to new ideas, and Keitel is not very receptive to things of the mind. It may be that my wife has solved my problem for me."

"I couldn't help it!" Frau Hoffmann broke in. "I was so excited. I just had to telephone to Henny. I had already told her what you did for my boy, Professor Zodius, and when this new miracle happened—well, I just had to tell Henny."

"Dear lady, I have been long exiled in the backwoods of Strasbourg," said Zodius. "Ought I to know Henny?"

But his heart was beating wildly: he might not know Henny, but he knew who she was—very well.

"Why, of course, I mean Henny von Schirach—you know, the daughter of Heinrich Hofmann."

"No relation to me," put in the general, rather stiffly. "One 'f'." *

A Prussian Junker would scarcely be likely to claim relationship with a photographer. Heinrich Hofmann was one of Hitler's early associates. He was a Munich photographer who was the first to make Hitler camera conscious—for the Führer's unpleasing appearance was included among his inferiority complexes, and was a

* Actually, Heinrich Hofmann's name has been spelled variously with one "f" or two. For the purposes of this record and to avoid confusion with General Hoffmann the single "f" will be used. D.B.

gift to his opponents. Hofmann managed to take some reasonable photographs of Hitler and expounded the possibilities of picture publicity. Thus he was appointed sole photographer to the Führer and the two have always been on intimate terms. (Their partnership has been very lucrative too. It is unpatriotic if any German home or shop does not display at least one photograph of Hitler—taken by Hofmann, the profits shared with his chief!) The photographer became one of Hitler's close associates—indeed, a personal confidant. His daughter, Henny, was at one time thought to have attracted the special interest of the Führer, but instead became the wife of the Youth Leader, another member of Hitler's closest circle.

Hence Lester's barely restrained excitement. If Frau Hoffmann had blabbed out the story to Henny, then it might easily find its way to Hitler without any official intervention. This method would be even better than the one originally planned.

Perforce he and Luna lingered for half an hour, accepting refreshments as well as thanks and congratulations. It seemed that Hoffmann did not wish to leave the credit or responsibility for action with his wife. He hinted that he had a cousin on Goering's staff—maybe the Field-Marshal ought to know of the potentialities of *Zodius'* skill.

"Certainly he should be warned. And Brauschitch and Keitel: and, of course, the Führer," said *Zodius* dramatically. "Sometimes the stars appear contradictory—they are not, but our knowledge is feeble. Sometimes they speak with one voice. Here is no experimental theory, Herr General—I can speak with assurance. There is danger threatening in the South."

"You mean, in North Africa?"

"No—in Italy!"

"Yes, you are probably right. We can only fight delaying actions in North Africa. They will last a long time, for the British and Americans are not very rapid, owing to their over-organisation. They are reluctant to strike until they outnumber us by at least three to one. But by midsummer even they should have cleared up North Africa. After that, we can presume, they will attempt landings in Italy. I doubt if they would be very dangerous, however, Professor *Zodius*."

"I was not thinking of military danger. The stars point to disaster to Italy from within: especially to Mussolini."

"What? But he is firmly established——"

"Today, but not tomorrow. I tell you, Herr General, that in this case I stake my reputation and my life on the message of the stars!"

He spoke almost fiercely: then, before Hoffmann and his wife could recover from their astonishment, he seized Luna's arm and led her from the house.

"I shall want to see Allenstein, urgently," he said, as they regained the flat.

"He shall be here tomorrow," she promised. "No—you are not going to settle down to talk—you are going to bed, brother. This business is a bigger strain than you know. You admitted that yourself!"

But his brain was too active, and he was glad of the relief of the dawn. In the middle of the morning Allenstein arrived, ostensibly to consult Luna.

"I need your advice, Allenstein," Lester said abruptly. "Maybe you will need to consult your people. It was quite true what I said—so far as astrological indications do mean anything, all practitioners are agreed that they presage disaster to Mussolini. I have several English books here—German prophecies are forbidden, but I imported these. Naylor is quite explicit, and even 'Old Moore' includes the suggestion. Now to have any effect in high quarters my foundation must be solid: Hitler's astrologers, whoever they are, would catch me out if I slipped in any detail. So, since in this case the indications are quite clear, I must use them. The question is, how can we direct them to our advantage? I could, by suggestion, make them believe that they could arrest the danger by astute political action. In that case I believe that we should over-run Italy rapidly, for I am certain that the Italians will never fight the British and Americans with any enthusiasm—and, of course, the collapse of Italy can be prophesied by political considerations as well as astrological indications! On the other hand, I can use the situation to suggest that the Germans should take over Italy, and make it a battlefield. We should probably prefer the former, since possession of Italy would give us invaluable bombing bases. But what would be the Russian reactions?"

"I can answer that without any consultation," Allenstein replied. "I can yell you that the situation in Russia has been far more serious than the outside world ever knew. Despite our heavy losses, we have not reached the limits of our huge manpower: with your help, we have replenished our munition supply . . . our spirit is as high

as ever. But our food situation is bad, almost desperate. The loss of the Ukraine hit us very hard. Our army is still comparatively well fed, but our civilian rations have reached their lowest limits. Therefore I suggest that you keep this in mind in all your calculations, Captain Lester—that you can do most to help us, not by capturing bomber bases—valuable for a long-term policy, but by drawing off German divisions from Russia.”

“I see,” Lester nodded. “With the German reserves weakened——”

“We can reconquer Ukraine. There is a popular fallacy that we can only attack in winter—and it is a fallacy. We can mount a tremendous summer offensive. Already even the threat of a Second Front has spread 40 German divisions across Western Europe. If you could neutralise another 30 or 40 divisions in Italy—German, not Italian, divisions—this would be a tremendous boon. You would have the least spectacular part of the campaign, but I take it that you do not consider such trifles?”

“No! Thank you, Captain Allenstein, the idea is now quite clear. Whatever happens in the next few weeks, my guiding principle shall be to pull German divisions out of Russia.”

“Thank you, Captain Lester, I am very grateful. Incidentally, do not be disappointed if we do not always express our gratitude very fervently. In Russia our policy is to concentrate confidence in the régime, not in its allies. And old suspicions still linger in many quarters—as, doubtless, they do in yours. And I have often remarked on this—in Russia today we suffer from a lack of people with intimate knowledge of the outside world. For many years we were ostracised: for more years we preferred to remain apart. Consequently many of our people have little or no appreciation of conditions abroad. Similarly, many of yours have little or no appreciation of conditions in Russia. But you and I, Captain Lester, have to rise above all prejudices. Both our countries are in danger: this is no question of ideologies, but of a battle for life. You agree?”

“With every word. Never fear, my friend. I can foresee very many ways of aiding your strategy. Those are my instructions as well as my own personal inclinations. Here is a map: let us sit down and examine the possibilities in the Mediterranean. A rough time-table would be invaluable to me.”

“I had better go now. My half-hour's interview is up. I will come back tonight, well after dark. Goodbye—*Tovarichi!*”

Lester's excitement was infectious, and Luna's patience was tested by her series of stupid clients, since she longed to discuss with him the ever-changing potentialities of the situation. Lester himself went out for a walk: an astrologer's life means long hours but little exercise. The interest of the old city, with its wealth of Gothic architecture, gave his mental energy a welcome relief. He wandered casually about the Altstadt, admiring the dignified dwelling houses of old-time merchants: then by the banks of the Oder.

The city teemed with life. Breslau had long been important economically, for Silesia is a rich province. The war, and the R.A.F. raids, had increased its importance. In the area round about had been re-established dozens of industries evacuated from the Ruhr and the Rhineland. A British occupation of Italy would bring them within easy bombing range. But Allenstein was right: at the moment the Russian viewpoint was the more urgent.

There is nothing more tiring than walking the pavements of a town. Luna would not nearly have finished her series of interviews. Nevertheless, he was tired of walking and turned towards home.

A spy cultivates what is popularly termed a "sixth sense," an instinct, if you will. Within a few minutes Lester was definitely uneasy: there was something wrong in the atmosphere. The most obvious suspicion was that he was being followed.

He did not turn round to look. A cinema advertised one of the German official films of the eastern front: he paid his two marks and took a seat. After a suitable interval, he adjourned to the lavatory, and then returned to a fresh place.

He got up to go just before the film was due to end. The man sitting next to him was clumsy, and trapped a fold of Lester's overcoat under his seat. There were muttered apologies and explanations: then a startling phrase.

"Warn Luna! Extra care! Two of my men arrested by the Gestapo."

"Thank you. My coat is not harmed," Lester said quietly.

He had recognised the voice: that of Dr. Kraus. It was impossible to give details: maybe it was better that Lester should not know. It would be disaster if the Gestapo broke into the organisation at this critical moment. Were the two men underlings, or did they know anything which mattered? A spy in a foreign land knows periods of acute depression as well as of exhilaration. Lester recognised the symptoms and strove to dispel them.

His first moment with Luna helped to restore his optimism. Her work for the day finished, she was studying a time-table—turning up details of the trains from Breslau to Berchtesgaden.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"You're going ahead a bit, sister!" Lester grinned, forgetting for the moment the anxiety of Kraus' news.

"I have the feeling that we are on the verge of our ambition," she replied.

Rapidly he told her of the whispered message in the cinema, but her confidence was not diminished.

"These things are bound to happen," she said. "But the two men know nothing of us—and, in any case, they will not talk. No, within a few days we shall get a call from Berchtesgaden."

"I doubt it. By the way, when is Wernski coming?"

"I do not know. It is impossible to tell. He may be——"

She was interrupted by the ring of the door bell.

"This is magic!" she smiled, a moment later. "Here is an unexpected client for you, Professor Zodius—he insists upon seeing you."

Wernski stared at Zodius in undisguised amazement. The transformation from the well-groomed British officer he had met in London was almost incredible.

"You would doubtless like me to cast your horoscope," said Zodius, in his grave professional tone. "The moment is auspicious—the Moon is in square with Saturn."

Wernski ran his hand over his rather scanty hair, as if undecided whether to take Zodius seriously. A quiet laugh re-assured him. After warm congratulations, he was eager for news and his eyes shone with excitement when he learned of the rapid progress which had been made.

"If you never did anything else, you did a grand job when you found Luna," Zodius concluded.

"Yes, she is magnificent. But you—I cannot control my amazement. The change is stupefying—you carry the part perfectly."

"The going has been easy so far. And now let us get to business

—I never give any client more than half an hour, and we do not know who is watching. Are you going to England soon ? ”

“ Either I shall be going, or one of my friends.”

“ I would rather that it were you. The smaller number of people involved, the better.”

“ Is it urgent ? ”

“ Vital.”

“ Then I will go myself. What do you wish me to do ? ”

“ You could smuggle a book into England ? ”

“ Easily. And then ? ”

“ Smuggle it back again.”

“ What ? ”

“ Something will have happened to it in the meantime. Take it to Colonel Metcalfe. And now, memorise these instructions carefully—you will put nothing on paper, naturally.”

For fifteen minutes Zodius talked quietly but incisively, occasionally repeating a pertinent phrase. Wernski listened intently.

“ That is all. You can reproduce those ideas in London ? ”

“ Easily.”

“ Good. Here is the book. Handle it carefully—it is very old.” He passed over the volume of Nostradamus. “ How soon can you be back ? ”

“ I don't know. But I will get there very quickly.”

“ How ? ”

“ Am I not a member of the German Secret Service ? And are not my missions very successful ? The Germans will smuggle me into England, book and all. If your people in London act quickly——”

“ They will ! ”

“ Then I should be back within fifteen days.”

“ Good.”

They shook hands warmly, and Wernski left. A few minutes later Luna dashed in—she had been interviewing one of her own clients in a neighbouring room.

“ Well ? ” she asked.

“ Very well. He has taken the book.”

“ Good. So we can go to Berchtesgaden ? ”

“ Not yet. I am ill.”

“ What ? ” she looked at him with sudden concern.

“ At least, I am about to be ill. Dr. Kraus will confirm that. I shall be ill for about fifteen days.”

Rapidly he outlined the agreed scheme to her. Since his conversation with Allenstein, he had a clearer lead, and could plan ahead his course of action.

"Our people gave me a free hand," he explained. "Since nobody could foresee the circumstances of my contacts in high places, if these materialised, all developments had to be left to me. Some moves are obvious. If I have the chance I shall try to sow confusion and dissension in the German ranks—to set Nazis against soldiers. In military operations, I must follow my own initiative. The objective is quite definite—to weaken Germany. Now Allenstein has also given me a lead. The Ukraine must be freed. He was right when he emphasised the food situation—the bravest and best-disciplined nation cannot fight without food. And the raw materials of the Ukraine are vital, too. Yes, I can begin to see where I am."

"But this waiting——"

"I know. Waiting is always the hardest part. But I must have that Nostradamus book. I couldn't prepare it before I left England, since I didn't know that Zodius had a copy. But it's a heaven-sent opportunity, and we can't neglect it. So we shall have to wait until Wernski returns—and therefore I am going to be ill for about fifteen days. Send for the doctor, sister. My illness is very painful."

"Where does it hurt?" she smiled.

"I don't know, yet. Dr. Kraus had better decide that."

The doctor advised a heart affliction. Lester insisted on keeping to his room—in many of his previous missions he had learned the value of playing a part thoroughly. Kraus undertook to look in periodically—in fact, to pursue the normal routine of doctor and patient.

"One more thing, Dr. Kraus," Lester said. "I had better have some tablets—something to make my heart beat like mad—something which gives rapid and visible effects. This is possible?"

"Quite easy. I'll send some round. Follow the instructions carefully."

"Why do you do all this, brother?" Luna asked, when the doctor had gone. "Why not just pretend?"

"You said that in our business we had to be very sensitive," he explained. "Maybe I am catching the faculty from you. Or is it calculation rather than instinct? I have a feeling that we shall be subjected to some form of examination before we move ahead."

"I see. But I am confident."

"So am I."

The anxious days passed. Lester kept to his room: he had arranged a signal with Luna whereby he could be warned of insistent visitors, so that he could be in bed—and prepared. With his usual thoroughness, he tried out one of the capsules which Dr. Kraus had provided. Its effects were not pleasant—a palpitation of the heart, a difficulty in breathing, and an unhealthy flush which completely altered the appearance of the normally pallid Zodius.

Two-thirds of the estimated period of fifteen days passed by. Luna kept up her series of consultations: every day Frau Hoffmann made anxious inquiries by telephone about Zodius' health, to receive reassuring news.

Then, one morning, Luna received an unexpected visitor—Allenstein. Another man accompanied him, a civilian. Allenstein introduced his companion as Herr Brincken.

They sat facing Luna in her consulting room, Allenstein slightly behind the other man.

"I have been telling my friend about Zodius," Allenstein began. "He has also heard a lot from Frau Hoffmann. So, naturally he is very anxious to consult the great man."

"I am certain that Zodius would be glad to see any friend of yours, Captain Allenstein," said Luna. "But not today—he is ill."

"So I heard. But I wondered if it would be possible—I mean to say, Herr Brincken is only in Breslau for the day."

A sudden chill gripped Luna. Allenstein's fingers were tapping on his knee—an unusual habit for him, as he was normally very self controlled. As he was behind his companion, his restlessness was unperceived—except by Luna. For Allenstein was tapping out a message in Morse: Luna spelled out the letters G-E-S. So Herr Brincken was a Gestapo spy!

"I know that my brother would like to oblige you, Captain Allenstein," she said, "but he is not fit. In our task, it is important to forget the body, and concentrate on things of the mind. That is not possible when the body is in pain."

"I understand. Nevertheless, I should very much like my friend to see Zodius."

"Wait. I will go to see him."

She went along the passage. Lester had received her signal—a weak tinkle of a bell which she touched with her foot as soon as her suspicion was aroused.

Now all his precautions were justified. Dr. Kraus' capsules worked rapidly—already Zodius looked a very sick man. In a few rapid sentences she acquainted him with the situation.

"I will come," he said.

"Shall I not bring them here?"

"No. It is better the other way round. Go to them."

"Zodius will see you," she announced.

They rose, as if expecting to be taken to the sick-room.

"No, stay. He insists on coming here—I am afraid for him, but he insists."

They sat down again: the atmosphere was strained. Three or four tense minutes passed. Then Zodius appeared in the doorway. He wore a silk dressing-gown of Chinese pattern: his flushed complexion contrasted vividly with his shock of white hair: he breathed with difficulty, and staggered as he crossed the room. Allenstein jumped to his assistance.

"You wished to see me, gentlemen?" Zodius gasped.

"Yes, my friend wished to consult you, but——"

"It is impossible. He may consult my sister—she can cast a horoscope as well as I can. But I cannot concentrate—I have to think of every breath I take."

His physical distress was very obvious. Allenstein glanced meaningly at Brincken, who nodded.

"My friend does not want to consult you professionally, Herr Professor Zodius," Allenstein said, quietly. "You know that, following your amazing success in the case of the Polish guerrillas, your extraordinary powers were mentioned to people in high quarters. I can now tell you that Herr Brincken is attached to the Führer's personal staff."

"You will understand," Brincken began—and his tone was remarkably gentle for a Gestapo agent!—"that before any invitation is issued to you, we must be satisfied about you. Admittedly, you do not look like a Communist assassin, but——"

"I quite understand, Herr Brincken," Zodius broke in. "Come back when I am better, and you may ask me anything you wish."

"But I am supposed to do that today."

"It is impossible. How can I think? Yet you have all my personal details—or you can get them from Strasbourg."

"Yes, we have all that. I have merely to check them up. There is something else. In the past—I am speaking very privately, Herr

Professor—in the past there have been charlatans who have deceived.”

“If that is your objective, you may go back,” Zodius said, in a low whisper. “I do not work miracles to order. Ask others what I can do—what I have done. I will not arrange staged performances.” His voice was now raised in an indignant shout.

He rose, as if about to leave. His eyes were flashing, and his cheeks were first pallid, then flushed. Allenstein rose to help him, but, before he could move, Zodius had collapsed on the floor.

Luna knelt by his side: then rushed along to his room for a small bottle. As the astrologer appeared to regain consciousness she held a red liquid to his lips—actually, it was a perfectly innocuous dose of coloured glycerine. The effect was almost instantaneous! With a little help, Zodius struggled to his chair.

“Have no fear, my friend, I shall not die,” he said to Brincken, who was regarding the scene with anxious eyes. “I know what is my fate. This will pass. It has happened before. Already I am mending. I know what the stars promise for me—my planet is strong. The stars cannot lie—men may misinterpret their message, but the stars cannot lie.”

Luna gazed at him anxiously as he rambled on. Then she saw the reason. While Brincken was staring fixedly at Zodius, Captain Allenstein’s finger was busy again, tapping out a message.

Zodius was by this time in the middle of a mass of astrologic jargon: suddenly he broke off.

“When you do come to consult me, my friend,” he whispered, “you must tell me everything. You have not done that today. You have something on your mind. You did not come to check my *bona fides*—you did that long ago. You wish to study my mind. If I am to meet the Führer, what ideas do I propose to transmit? Is that what Herr Himmler would like to know?”

Brincken started, then seemed very ill at ease. Nothing is more disconcerting than the abrupt revelation of the idea dominating your mind. For a moment he stuttered, but before he could frame a word Zodius was speaking again.

“You may take back your answer. It is this: I do not know. I am no charlatan, my friend. My knowledge is not omnipotent: it is founded on the wisdom of the past and present, but I may err in its use. If I can be of service to the Fatherland, I am here. If not, I still remain here, or I return to Strasbourg. But I only say what the stars tell me to say—not what mortals dictate.”

The penetrating eyes of Zodius were staring hard at Brincken as he spoke. With no preliminary information, it was difficult to know if he were taking the right line.

"The stars above us govern our conditions," the English Shakespeare said, Zodius went on. "Maybe you do not believe. I do. A man cannot pervert what he believes. I have known for many moons that I was destined to be consulted by the Great Ones. My friend, I do not know who you are, for you do not represent yourself, but others. You may tell them what you have seen, and what I have said. And now you will go away. This illness saps my strength, and I must be strong for the days to come."

It was as if he had gathered strength for his firm declaration of his faith: now he slumped in his chair. Luna rushed to his side.

"My brother!" she cried anxiously. Then, turning to Allenstein: "This should never have happened. Help me to get him back to bed."

Together they supported the sagging figure of Zodius. As they laid him on his bed, the sick man made a very pronounced wink.

"Magnificent!" Allenstein whispered. "A very difficult performance, but magnificent!"

"Did I guess the right line of action?"

"It could not have been bettered. I must get back to him—I can easily complete the impression. Goodbye."

Luna also returned to the consulting-room to show the visitors out. Her nerves were perhaps even more strained than those of Zodius, but any signs of tension could be attributed to the anxiety of his illness. But as soon as the door had closed she rushed back to his room.

"You are all right?" she asked.

"Quite all right, sister! Give me those other tablets and let's stop the thumping of my heart."

"I agree with Allenstein—it was magnificent. But I want to learn, brother—why did you adopt different tactics with this man?"

"His personality is of a different type. He is neither a bully nor a fool. He is more impressionable to my latent power than to any practical demonstration. He did not come to be convinced that I was a good astrologer. Had that been the issue, they would have sent someone who knew something about astrology. No, friend Brincken did not come from Hitler."

"Then from whom?"

"At a guess, Himmler—Alenstein may be able to confirm that."

Himmler knows everything that happens in Germany. If Hitler is to have a new astrologer, then Himmler must get at him first."

"But this is what puzzles me—you did not promise to take the line he wanted you to take. Surely that is what he was after?"

"No, I think not. In these palace feuds, the first ambition of each party is not to put forward their own claims, but to block those of others. Had I agreed even by implication to be Himmler's mouthpiece, I would have been in his power from that moment. But now he will be convinced that I am not to be the mouthpiece of Goering or Keitel. If my reasoning is correct, that will satisfy him."

"I see. Yes, brother, I am learning."

"We shall see if I am right. But now I want to learn, too. Never mind about the time-tables to Berchtesgaden—our transport will be arranged for us. I want to know all about Hitler's horoscope."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

NEEDLESS to say, Lester had studied Hitler's horoscope long before he left England, and had committed its characteristics to memory. But, now there was every indication that the moment of serious action was at hand, he wished to cover the whole ground again, to review the possibilities against the background of recent events—and to arrange an accord of ideas with Luna.

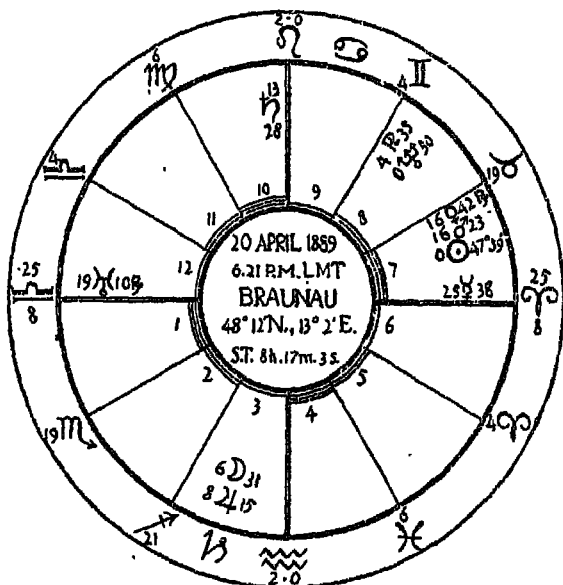
She got out the circular chart—every astrologer works out Hitler's horoscope almost as a matter of routine.

In the astral circle appeared Hitler's natal information: born on 20th April, 1889, at 6.21 p.m. L.M.T., at Braunau, 48° 12' N, Sidereal Time, 8 h, 17 m. 3 s.

"This is where our drama goes into serious rehearsal. Prompt me on the analysis, sister," he said, gazing hard at the horoscope—which, indeed, he could have reproduced from memory. "You know ten times more about these things than I do."

"It is fairly simple," she said. "His Ascendant is Libra—at the moment of his birth the twenty-fifth degree and eighth minute of the sign of the Balance was rising on the eastern horizon. But the first House also contains the first twenty-one degrees of Scorpio, so that his character will be influenced by this sign. Uranus had just risen at his birth, being in 19° 10' of Libra—only 6° above the

horizon. Mercury was almost setting in 26° of Aries, and the Sun was in the west, of course—at 6.21 p.m. of April 20th. All the planets except the Moon and Jupiter were above the earth—three of them angular, in the seventh House. The most elevated planet was Saturn, in the tenth House.”



“Yes, I remember all that. Now for a few deductions. Give me the formal routine and I will consider how it can be adjusted to our purposes.”

“First, notice the position of Mars and Saturn. Mars represents energy, Saturn control. If these two planets are in good aspect—that is, 60 or 120 degrees apart—this indicates boldness well directed. But if they afflict, then the result is uncontrolled force—that is, cruelty, sadism and violence. In this horoscope Mars and Saturn are in square—a very bad aspect.”

“Well, that’s a good beginning—accurate enough, though maybe it wouldn’t be wise to tell Hitler so! But we can pass over that, and emphasise the influence of Mars on the fortunes of war. Now his Ascendant, Libra. That makes his ruling planet Venus.”

"Yes. Now Libra is an 'airy' sign—intellectual rather than practical—but the only planets in airy signs are Uranus, in Libra, and Neptune and Pluto in Gemini. In fact, the horoscope points heavily towards the earth—the Sun, Venus and Mars in Taurus, the Moon and Jupiter in Capricorn. After the Ascendant Libra, the Sun, Moon and dominant planet Venus are the most important influences."

"That means that, in spite of his Ascendant being airy, Hitler inclines to an earthly or practical temperament rather than intellectual."

"Yes. Hitler is proud of his powers as an orator—indicated by the presence of Mercury in Aries. Note especially Uranus—rising. Uranus is usually called the planet of dictators. Mussolini has him in the tenth House: Franco has Uranus rising: for that matter, so has Roosevelt, but in his case his influence is modified by the benign influences of the Sun and Moon. Uranus was dominant in the horoscopes of Lenin and of King Alexander of Yugoslavia."

"Good. I can see that Uranus is going to be very useful."

"There is another square to be noted," Luna went on, now thoroughly and professionally engrossed. "At least, it is nearly a square—Saturn is at 87° to Venus and Mars. I read that this way: Saturn is in the royal sign, Leo, and signifies ambition. But he is afflicted by Mars and by the ruling planet, Venus, this ambition will be limited. How? Mars and Venus are in the seventh House, which stands for marriage, partnership and open enemies—that is, war. Hence Hitler's ambitious career will be checked by war."

"Or by marriage or partnership!"

"He isn't married."

"It isn't too late. But he has a partner."

"Ah, I see your direction—Mussolini."

"Yes."

"The signs are stronger towards war—Mars is one of the afflicting planets."

"A pity that Hitler hasn't married," Lester reverted. "He might have been more human. And his ruling planet is Venus, too!"

"That doesn't make him a Great Lover," she smiled. "Look at her position—in the house of war and conjoined to the planet of war. This modifies her influence considerably. And you had better remember this, brother, for Hitler will know it: astrologers

are agreed that the dominant aspect in his horoscope is the square of Saturn to Mars, which we have already examined. This means that the intervening degrees of the four fixed signs—Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius—are of especial importance.”

“Ah, you prompt me there. I remember Gleadow’s very remarkable analysis *—I learned it by heart.”

“Your memory is good.”

“Yes. I gave Hoffmann details of Hitler’s achievements under the rising moon. Let me recite Gleadow’s list to you—or do you know it already?”

“No. I have read very few English books.”

“He certainly demonstrates the importance of the four fixed signs you mentioned. Listen to this—I’ll quote verbatim: ‘The dominant aspect in Hitler’s horoscope is the square of Saturn in 13° Leo to Venus and Mars in 16° Taurus: therefore the middle degrees of the four fixed signs Taurus, Leo, Scorpio, Aquarius are of prime importance to him. And this is what we find:—

Father died, January 3rd, 1903 Jupiter 19 Aquarius.

Mother died, December 21st, 1907 Jupiter 13 Leo.

Hitler wounded, October 7th, 1916 Uranus 16 Scorpio

Hitler gassed, October 13th, 1918 Saturn 13 Leo.

Munich *putsch*, 1919 Sun 16 Scorpio

Nazi party founded, 1919 Mars 14 Taurus.

Hitler lost presidential election, April 10th,

1932 Jupiter 12 Leo.

Hitler became Chancellor, January 30th,

1933 Ascendant 16 Taurus.

Munich Pact, September 30th, 1938 Ascendant 15 Leo!”

“That is indeed remarkable. As I have said, I am often tempted to believe in these things. By the way, if you want to continue the rehearsal—I have a client due—I have turned up one or two books and articles which have some bearing on the conception-horoscope theory.”

“Good. It has already been very useful.”

Three days elapsed. Then Frau Hoffmann arrived, bursting with

* Rupert Gleadow’s book, “Astrology in Everyday Life” (Faber and Faber, 8s. 6d.) was a principal basis of Lester’s early studies. He described it to me as one of the best books on astrology in his acquaintance, and acknowledged the great help it had been in the preparation for his mission. Hitler’s horoscope printed overleaf has been reproduced from this book by the author’s kind permission.—D.B.

excitement. Luna hurriedly gave the signal to Zodius and the tablet produced its startling results. At the right moment Luna led her visitor to the oracle's bedroom. Frau Hoffmann was shocked at the appearance of Zodius.

"Have no fear, dear lady," he said. "My time to die has not yet come. I am getting better. Very soon I shall be about again."

She accepted his assurance gratefully, then plunged into her news. Henny had just telephoned her. The Führer had been told of the wonderful prevision of the seer of Strasbourg and was anxious to see him!

"You will go, of course?"

"Of course," Lester agreed. "But not yet. I cannot be sensitive to delicate influences while my body burns."

"But the Führer—once he has an idea, he is so impatient."

"Even the Führer must wait. Next week, maybe, I shall be fit to travel."

She was torn between her anxiety for his health and her desire that he should justify her faith by his influence in high quarters. Yet Zodius was so obviously ill. Frau Hoffmann went off as excitedly as she had come. It was an easy guess that within the hour she would be telephoning her friend Henny.

"I am rather anxious," Zodius confessed to Luna as they sat over supper. "It would be tragedy if our timing went wrong. I ought to have thought of the Nostradamus idea earlier—"

"How could you foresee that it would be wanted?"

"Am I not an astrologer?" he grinned. "Seriously, I hope that Wernski will not be delayed. These people have changeable ideas."

"Wernski will not fail. He is an amazing man."

Lester had every confidence in the Pole. Yet the spy faces many hazards, and the slightest accident may bring an abrupt end to his career. True, Wernski was in an unusual position, since he could claim support from both sides!

Each hour increased the tension. Now that the moment was at hand, neither Zodius nor Luna could deny the atmosphere of strain. Their experience with Brincken intensified their anxiety. Allenstein had reported that the Gestapo agent was more than satisfied, but there might be others. It is easy to face a spy when you know that he is a spy: the unknown is dangerous, and wearing.

They interpreted Frau Hoffmann's news as an excited gesture, not a formal invitation. Nor could they anticipate how this might come.

Probably secretly. Since Hitler had forbidden the practice of astrology in Germany, he was scarcely likely to advertise his own consultations.

Lester sought to relieve the hours of strain by intense study. Already he knew much about the private lives of Hitler and his immediate associates. He did not know which of them he might encounter, so studied them all—where possible, Luna cast their horoscopes as a basis of convincing talk.

Anxiously he awaited Wernski. Every consideration seemed to suggest dependence on the Nostradamus theme—all aspects of Hitler's horoscope must have been pointed out already by the Führer's successive astrologers. True, they might have glossed over any unpleasant suggestions, but Zodius was scarcely likely to inculcate confidence by prophesying disasters. Should he contradict previous calculations, he might easily be unmasked. But the Nostradamus theme promised comparative security as well as results.

"I do not like it, brother," said Luna. "When I went out today I felt that I was being followed. There is something wrong, I feel it. This is a quiet road, but there is always someone hanging about."

"I expected that. The Gestapo will take all precautions. I hope that all your clients are the usual assortment of nit-wits. If anybody called who was politically suspect—well, they might draw all kinds of wrong conclusions."

Luna's apprehension increased next morning. Very carefully, from a corner of the window, Lester surveyed the street. A dozen yards along leaning against a wall, was a workman: half an hour later he had scarcely moved.

The bell rang: Luna's first client had arrived. The workman took out a clumsy watch and looked at the time.

With the client dismissed early, Lester resumed his post at the window. The workman had gone, but another man was now re-coating the directing arrows to water-hydrants with white paint. As Luna's second client arrived, this man, too, looked at his watch.

"I've got it," Lester muttered. "They are photographing all your visitors."

"I knew that we were being watched!"

"Yes. I wonder what they do at night?"

"Why?"

"Because it might be fatal if Wernski were seen coming here!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SHE could not understand his concern.

"But Wernski could come to me as a client," she suggested.

"I am thinking far ahead. Wernski is doing a very dangerous job. The chances are against his carrying it through the war. If he were ever caught out, then suspicion might devolve on us—even if by that time we had finished our task. There are reasons why it is vital that there should be no suspicion—at any time! No, Wernski must not come. It does not fit, anyway—a good spy does not consult astrologers."

"But how can we stop him?"

"Kraus must do it. Ring him up—say that I am now very much better, and it is not necessary for the specialist to come and visit me. Dr. Kraus will of course come as usual."

"I see."

Lester was profoundly uneasy. Wernski, in his eagerness, might make direct for Luna's flat. On the other hand, he was an agent of skill and experience, who was scarcely likely to take things for granted.

There was no word from Allenstein. He would certainly know or guess that the Gestapo investigation would not end with Brincken's interview, so wisely kept away. Dr. Kraus made his routine visit. If Wernski should call on him first, matters should be easy. But this was doubtful—Wernski was playing a lone hand on his dangerous task, and avoided contact with other aspects of the underground organisation so far as was possible.

Two more days of strain passed. Then, in the early hours of the morning, Lester lay awake. His brain was over-active: there is always a period of intense strain on the verge of great events.

A rustle in the room, and Luna stood beside his bed.

"Come, brother!" she whispered.

She took his hand, and led him to her room. The night was rather boisterous, with a noisy wind.

"Listen!" she whispered.

The moments passed. Then a faint tapping against the window. It might have been a light fragment of timber, loosened by the wind. Lester waited. After an interval the tapping recurred.

Lester smiled in the darkness. The taps were identical and rhythmic, one dot followed by two dashes, · — —, the Morse for W.

"It must be Wernski," he said quietly. "Open the window, gently.

She obeyed, pulling aside the heavy curtain and opening the casement. Ten seconds later Wernski stood beside them.

"Thanks," he said casually. "It was cold out there!"

Luna closed the window and pulled the curtain into place: Lester switched on the light.

"How did you get here, friend?"

"From the fire escape. I entered the flats ten doors along, at the back, and got along the roof. I had a warning to be careful——"

"From Kraus?"

"No. I have not seen him. An instinctive warning, if you will."

"It was opportune, anyway," Lester said. Rapidly he outlined to Wernski the dramatic situation which prevailed.

"Sorry I'm two days late," the Polish spy said. "There were difficulties—they sent me to Berlin to report."

"You have the book?"

"Yes. Here it is."

Lester seized the volume of Nostradamus' *Centuries* eagerly. Rapidly he turned over its pages—then turned to Wernski with a look of intense disappointment.

"They have not done as I asked?" he said.

"No. They could not do it. I was to explain this—the book was too old. Already some pages are almost perished. If your people had tampered with it, then it must have been obvious. They were emphatic—it was quite impossible."

The idea, formed quite casually in the consulting room of Zodius at Strasbourg, had by this time become of overwhelming importance. So far as he could plan ahead at all, he was building upon his handling of the Nostradamus theme. Suddenly he felt very dispirited and weary.

"You mean to say——" he began.

"Wait!" Wernski interrupted. "Your people are very clever. When they could not do as you wished, they thought of an alternative. Here is the message I was to convey to you. As I said, it was physically impossible to substitute a page or two in your book. Thus an alternative plan was necessary. You will recall that in the edition you brought from Strasbourg the seventh *Century* is incomplete, stopping at number 42. The remaining 58 have never been discovered—although in an edition published in 1605 by Benoist Rigaud there are added 58 sixains, or six-lined verses, in

place of the usual quatrains. These were said to have been found among the papers of Nostradamus by Vincent Sève of Beaucaire."

"Yes, I remember that. Go on—I am beginning to see. The sixains were supposed to be forgeries, were they not?"

"Yes. Your friend James Laver points out that they are not only in a different form of verse, but are quite different in style from the quatrains. Instead of the abbreviations—'telegraphese,' Laver called it—of Nostradamus, they are more leisured and poetical. Some of them suggest the possibility that they were written after the events which they 'prophesy.'

"Now when Nostradamus died, he left lots of papers—he mentioned them in his will, and directed that no inventory should be made of them: instead, they should be kept in baskets until his son was old enough to examine them. It was among these papers that Vincent Sève professed to have found the 58 sixains, 27 new quatrains and a number of other prophecies. He did not publish all that he found. Nor did he get all that Nostradamus left. The seer was a very famous man when he died, and even in the sixteenth century there were souvenir hunters. Sève came from Beaucaire, just across the river from Tarascon, where Nostradamus spent his last years. Am I making myself quite clear?"

"Admirably, my dear Wernski. Your memory is phenomenal. Go on."

"Sève enlisted one or two helpers in his examination of the Nostradamus papers. Among them was a young priest named Montigny, who happened to be visiting a relative in Beaucaire. He was very intrigued at the task, and as a souvenir of the unusual weeks spent on the examination he took away with him a bundle of Nostradamus' manuscripts. They concerned the astrologer's life story rather than his prophecies—there was a suggestion that, while Sève published a new version of the prophecies, Montigny might write his biography. However, his bishop apparently frowned on the enterprise—even in those days astrology had its enemies. Montigny found himself appointed to the parish of Fresnes, near Nancy, where the bishop held such strong opinions that the priest locked up the Nostradamus parchments.

"He died rather young, and the documents remained in a locked drawer in the presbytery. Nearly a century and a half passed before they were found—when the presbytery took fire, but most of the contents were saved, the drawer of the desk being damaged and

opened. The incumbent of the day could make nothing of the papers—but he was impecunious and old parchment has a value. He sold the whole lot for eight francs to a merchant at Strasbourg.”

“ Ah ! ”

“ You know the fate of old parchments ? They were commonly used in the manufacture of drums. Even today, many a child's drum is stretched with old legal documents. Now we move on another hundred and seventy-five years. There is an astrologer in Strasbourg named Zodius. He goes to an antique shop in Strasbourg in search of suitable hangings for his consulting-room—something unusual, so that his clients may be impressed. In the shop he sees a set of tambours ; they are interesting—the painting on their deep wooden hoops shows that they belonged to the National Guard of Strasbourg in 1789. As was quite normal in those days, the stretched parchment bore faint signs of old writing. Rather intrigued, Zodius bends down to examine it. You can picture the scene ? ”

“ Of course. Was I not there ? One or two phrases struck familiar chords——”

“ Not immediately, but later. They remained in your mind. Your curiosity aroused, you returned to the shop and asked to be allowed to examine the drums in greater detail. On most of them the handwriting was the same : on another, quite different—it was part of a document relating to a priest called Montigny. Now you were really on the scent. Like all good astrologers, you were well informed on the subject of the missing prophecies of Nostradamus. Yet the difficulties were immense—the tambours had been well beaten, and in their centre the writing had disappeared.”

“ Naturally, I bought the drums ? ”

“ Yes. The curiosity of the dealer was scarcely aroused—astrologers do make strange purchases. You removed the stretched parchment very carefully : on the reverse side, at least, the writing was faded but clear. Within an hour you knew that you had made an antiquarian discovery of importance.”

“ Of course. There was the one parchment concerning Montigny, and the others——”

“ Five in number—the six under-surfaces of the drums were blanks. But the five——”

“ Were the papers of Nostradamus.”

“ At least, part of his papers. Three of them were no more than notes, mostly medical. But the remaining two delighted you.

Parts of the script were undecipherable, but you were able to make out no fewer than seventeen of the missing 58 quatrains."

"Excellent! There is just one point—why did I not seek credit by announcing my discovery to the world?"

"You wanted the remaining 41 quatrains. You confided in the antique dealer—he died six years ago—and he undertook the search. In 1789, as ancient records showed, the National Guard of Strasbourg had twelve tambours. The dealer began to search for the others. When he died, Zodius carried on—he was a well-known frequenter of the antique shops of Alsace."

"Quite true."

"He has not yet found the missing drums. But at least he has the parchments containing the seventeen quatrains!"

Wernski picked up his overcoat, which he had flung on Luna's bed. With a penknife, he pricked gently at the stitches of the lining. From a cunningly concealed aperture in the seam of the coat he withdrew a long, narrow roll. Opened out, it was revealed as a number of circular pieces of thick parchment, of about sixteen to eighteen inches diameter. Their edges were punctuated with small holes, where they had been laced to the wooden hoops of drums. On one side, a rough circular patch had been beaten blank by drumsticks.

"These are the finest forgeries I have ever encountered," Wernski commented, excitedly. "Even the ink was made up to a sixteenth-century French formula. The handwriting was copied from a Nostradamus MS in the British Museum. The fading was arranged by exposing the writing to strong lights at short distances. And the parchments were fixed on to drums and beaten for hours. Your people are much cleverer than they pretend to be, Captain Lester."

"I agree." He was holding up the peculiar parchments eagerly, endeavouring to decipher the indistinct words.

"These are the quatrains you need," Wernski pointed out. "They follow the lines you outlined to me. Now, you have the background correctly? I need hardly tell you that there *was* a priest named Montigny at Fresnes in the years following the death of Nostradamus."

"I know that our people would not slip up on details like that. I presume that I destroyed the wooden hoops of the drums, of no interest to me?"

"Yes."

"Thanks, friend, you have done a wonderful job. If you had been caught——"

"I am a German agent. Naturally, I am not searched. There is nothing more I can do, I think. Luna can always get into touch with me. Your friends send you their greetings and good wishes. Ah, but it is a tonic to me, to breathe the free air of England even for a few days! Your British people have only one major fault."

"Which is?"

"They do not know how fortunate they are! Oh, by the way, here is the receipt for the 2,500 francs you paid to the antique dealer at Strasbourg for the six tambours!"

Lester gripped Wernski's hand firmly as the Pole rose to go. Then the light was extinguished and he climbed out on to the fire escape.

"There goes a very brave man," Luna whispered.

"Yes. And here comes an astrologer making a very rapid recovery from a serious illness. I am nearly fit to travel. A good dose of parchment will set me on my feet again."

They sat through the night, examining the circular pieces and marvelling at the cleverness of the forgery. Evidence in all such cases is circumstantial. Zodius might not be able to prove legally that the manuscripts were those of Nostradamus, but any opponents would scarcely be able to prove that they were not.

Now the strain of waiting assumed a different character. Luna reported to Frau Hoffmann the rapid progress of Zodius, never doubting that the news would find its way to other quarters.

Two days passed: three: four. Then, after dark, a ringing on the bell. Luna admitted a man in civilian clothes, though his bearing was military.

"Herr Professor Zodius?"

"Yes."

"I am one of the adjutants of the Führer. I have a summons for you."

"I have been awaiting it. My bag is packed."

"Good. I have reserved a compartment on the night train to Munich."

"Come, sister, get ready," said Zodius.

"What is this?" the visitor demanded. "I know nothing of your sister. I have orders to take Herr Professor Zodius to Berchtesgaden—and him alone!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE adjutant's words struck like a staggering and unforeseen blow.

Lester's mind worked at lightning speed—to a spy, instant decision is a vital quality. Without Luna he would lose half his value as an astrologer—to say nothing of the moral backing of her courage. His mind was made up immediately.

"Without my sister I cannot travel," he announced, firmly. He sat down in his chair, indicating the finality of his decision.

"I tell you that I am ordered to take you to Berchtesgaden—" the adjutant blustered.

"You are ordered to take Zodius, the seer. By force you can only take Zodius the man. My sister is part of me. For the task before me, she is vital. Therefore, I do not travel without her. There is no argument, my friend. Maybe you do not understand these matters of the unseen. If you hesitate, there is a telephone here—you may consult your headquarters."

The adjutant, obviously impressed by the personality of Zodius, gratefully accepted the suggestion. But, despite his storming and use of official priorities, he was unable to make a rapid connection with Munich.

"We shall miss the train!" he cried, in exasperation.

"My friend, I assure you that you will be right if you take us both."

The adjutant hesitated: after all, if the woman were not needed, she could be dumped at Munich.

"Very well," he agreed.

They walked to the station: then the train rumbled through the night. There were many halts. Although south-eastern Germany had at that time escaped large-scale bombing attacks, the railway confusion of the west was bound to have its effects on all traffic. The train arrived at Munich five hours late; and the adjutant immediately telephoned to Berchtesgaden, presumably about Luna. An official car awaited the travellers.

It sped to the south, rapidly approaching the mountains. Zodius and Luna sat in the back of the car, the adjutant beside the driver. Their companion had scarcely exchanged a hundred words with them during the night: evidently the escorting of astrologers was a new job for him, and he found it rather overpowering.

The car swept along the excellent motor road at a great pace.

Now the mountains were higher : the region about Berchtesgaden is one of the grandest corners of the Bavarian Alps. Suddenly the car screamed to a halt, at a barrier across the road. Armed guards approached : they surveyed Zodius in some curiosity, but the adjutant produced a pass which satisfied them.

Now it was clear that the end of the long journey was near at hand. When Hitler bought the Haus Wachenfeld, on the Obersalzberg, it was just the country house of a Hamburg merchant—private, yet public. Responsible officers pointed out that a man with a rifle—especially a modern weapon with telescopic sights—could easily assassinate the Führer from a distance. Thus neighbouring roads were closed, and the surrounding hills bought up and patrolled. If Hitler is ever murdered, the deed is likely to be done at close quarters.

The car halted at the foot of a broad flight of steps. The adjutant helped Luna and Zodius to alight, and conducted them to the main door. A few moments' wait in the hall, and an officer in S.S. uniform joined them. From a description, Zodius recognised him—a large and powerful man. This was Schaub—Beefy Schaub, his friends called him. He was the personal adjutant to Hitler : not merely a bodyguard, but a valet as well. In his cups—for, unlike his master, he imbibed liberally—he was reputed to have boasted that he even washed the Führer's back—and held a razor to the Führer's throat !

He greeted the visitors civilly enough, though his curiosity was only too evident. He conducted them to a small suite of rooms, comfortably furnished in the local style : the sitting-room was heated by a porcelain stove of Bavarian pattern.

"You would like to rest after your journey, doubtless," he said. "A meal will be served at one o'clock. The Führer will see you during the afternoon."

"No !" said Zodius.

"What ?" cried Schaub, obviously astounded.

"Tell the Führer this : let us meet after the rising of the Moon."

"If he says this afternoon, it will be this afternoon."

"You will tell him what I have said, please. Thank you."

Schaub retired to the door after a prolonged stare at his visitors. Zodius recalled him.

"Will you please also prepare another room for my sister ?" he said.

"Your sister? I hadn't heard anything about a lady until today, and I presumed that she was your wife." The look in his eyes betrayed his character. Schaub had a reputation for women as well as wine. Luna was worth looking at, and his glance was sensuous.

"There may be trouble with that man," Luna whispered, as he withdrew.

Zodius took her by the arm and led her into his room.

"Be very careful how you talk," he warned in a very low tone. "They may have installed a microphone in the sitting-room—or in my room. Yours has been prepared at the last minute, so ought to be clear. But keep to whispers to be safe. You are right about Schaub—he looked at you strangely. But he is afraid of me."

"Anyway, brother, you must be the first man who ever said 'No' to Hitler."

"You are wong, Luna. The Poles said it in 1939. I hope that I do not have to pay the same bitter price as they have done."

"And I hope that you will receive a juster reward," she added, with a trace of bitterness.

They settled down to rest, for the following hours promised to impose a great strain. It seemed difficult to realise that they were on the verge of achieving their ambition. Lester dozed intermittently: through his brain flashed reminiscences of some of the moments which had led to this: his landing in Holland, the death of Zodius in Strasbourg: the "experiment" with Frau Hoffmann: the dramatic encounter with Allenstein. Strangely enough, Luna was no character in his dreams: already she seemed to be part of his life.

There was a great quiet about the mansion. In one wing, Lester knew, worked a corps of military officers and political secretaries. But the other side was sacred to Hitler and his intimate friends.

A tap at the door: a maid entered, wearing a charming Bavarian peasant costume: she smiled pleasantly as she laid the table for a meal. She took advantage of her movements to get a view of Zodius from many angles. Evidently servants' gossip followed similar patterns in the Haus Wachenfeld to those of any English mansion. Equally obvious, the fame of Zodius had travelled before him.

The meal eaten, the maid cleared the dishes. The hours passed undisturbed. Evidently Zodius had won his first success—an easy one, for Hitler's superstitions about the moon's influence were well known.

Darkness fell : Luna clung to the arm of Zodiuss : she led him towards her own room.

" Brother, I am almost afraid."

" Have no fear. We shall not fail."

" I do not like that man Schaub——"

" No, but you need not be concerned. He is afraid. When a master is superstitious, so is the man. Schaub is afraid of my occult powers, as an ignorant man in the presence of knowledge. He is wary. For a time, at least, I may be a powerful influence on Hitler. Therefore Schaub must keep in my good graces."

" The moment seems unreal. We have worked for it so hard—and yet it seems to have come too easily."

" That is a tribute to the organisation behind us. Yet our adventure has only just begun. Everything to date was only the preliminary. Now we face the culmination—alone. But have no fear, I say. I have never entered on a dangerous mission with more confidence, with my background more firmly founded."

Nevertheless, as he admitted later, he was fighting hard to control his own excitement. So much depended upon the moment when he confronted Hitler. The Führer was noted for his instantaneous and instinctive likes and dislikes. Was he sensitive, as he pretended ? Would he guess the presence of an enemy ? If his immediate impressions were not favourable, then the adventure might come to an inglorious conclusion—with the two seers packed off on a return journey to Breslau ! And quite certainly the opportunity would never recur.

Schaub entered, after a preliminary knock.

" The Führer will see you," he announced. But he stood still, staring at them.

" You may ease your mind, my friend. Search me, if you wish."

Startled as his thoughts were so instantly revealed, Schaub began to stammer.

" You are responsible for the safety of the Important One," said Zodiuss, gravely. " You will take no risks."

Thus encouraged, Schaub ran his practised hands over the clothes of Zodiuss. Then he turned to Luna.

" You have a woman searcher here ? " Zodiuss said, coldly.

" No."

" But you knew that there was a woman concerned."

" Well, I thought——"

He had obviously hoped to search Luna himself. The eye of Zodius was forbidding. Schaub revealed himself as a liar: from the passage there appeared the Bavarian maid, who rapidly revealed herself as no amateur of police search.

"You will not smoke in the Führer's presence," he announced.

Lester turned his head aside to hide a smile—at least Hitler shared one foible with Queen Victoria! But "I do not smoke," he said, acidly. Schaub led the way along a corridor and down a flight of stairs. He knocked, and flung open a door. Zodius and Luna walked in, slowly.

The room was large: at its extremity stood Hitler, by a log fire. On the rug lay a large Hungarian sheepdog, roused by the opening of the door. It advanced suspiciously. Zodius gently held down his hand: the sensitive nostrils sniffed it: the dog looked up, satisfied that the hand was friendly. His tail began to wag.

All this was keenly observed by Hitler: now the door had closed behind them. Zodius walked with dignity across the room: never had his personality been more dominating: his shock of white hair emphasised the bright flash of his eyes—and contrasted with the dark beauty of Luna.

Hitler stared at him: words of greeting rumbled on his lips, but were inarticulate.

"I know why you have summoned me on this night, *mein Führer*," Zodius began.

"Yes."

"In two hours we shall see the Full Moon of the Year."

"I know it. That was why."

Hitler was obviously uneasy. Was this the man who dominated half of Europe? When next alone with Zodius, Luna's first comment was "What a lonely man! If I did not hate him, I might be sorry for him. And how his mind is troubled—he does not sleep, that is obvious. And did you note his eyes—tears are no strangers to them. I do not envy him!"

The conversation had opened without any formal greeting. Now it halted. Hitler's demeanour was almost apprehensive—maybe the personality of Zodius was overpowering him. For several moments a strained silence lingered: deliberately Zodius prolonged it—obviously his own nerve was stronger than that of Hitler.

"Sit down," Hitler said abruptly.

The log fire crackled: the room was only moderately warm, but Hitler was sweating—it is a characteristic he shares with Mussolini.

Luna's keen eyes noticed an absorbent lining inside his shirt collar.*

Hitler sat by the side of a table, still ill at ease. Zodiuss made no attempt to help him. A normal host would have eased the atmosphere by asking about his guests' journey, or if they had been made comfortable.

Casually yet carefully Zodiuss studied his man. Certainly the dictator was not very impressive. His ugly nose emphasised his low, retreating forehead: his broad cheek bones were scarcely Nordic in their lines: nor did his small eyes and dark hair fit the standard picture of Germanic physical perfection. He was glancing nervously at Zodiuss: there was no charm in his eyes—rather, a suggestion of repulsion.

"I have heard of you," Hitler said, awkwardly. "I wished to see you. Probably you have already studied my horoscope."

"Yes. And we have studied those of your father and mother."

"Ah!" Hitler sprang up from his chair: now his restraint vanished rapidly—his eyes shone with a fierce excitement. "I was most interested in what you said to General Hoffmann. I gather that you have made a special study of conceptional horoscopes. The subject has always intrigued me. I wanted to talk to you about it."

"Yes, but not here."

"What?"

"There are malefic influences—I feel them. This room is intellectual—but it is surrounded by earthly influences."

Hitler looked at him keenly. "Keppler said that," he muttered. "He was often wrong."

"Or was it that others said that he was wrong?" Zodiuss suggested, in defence of the last official astrologer.

"I have sometimes wondered," Hitler admitted. His uneasiness returned. Zodiuss recalled the reports that Keppler had been executed: if his prophecies were later substantiated, then Hitler might indeed be tortured with misgivings!

"To understand the directions of the stars, it is vital that their influence should be undisturbed," Zodiuss went on. "Here the atmosphere is not right. I do not feel at ease. My sister has not spoken a word—and she is more sensitive than I am."

"I seemed to smell blood on the stairs," she whispered.

Hitler was startled. Months earlier he had narrowly escaped

* Mussolini has much more primitive methods of disposing of perspiration—those of the Italian peasant: effective, but not pretty. D.B.

assassination by one of his own followers, an S.A. group leader named Krause. The man was shot down by the guards at the foot of the stairs in the great hall.

"Shall we go out on to the mountain?" Zodiuss suggested. "Let us get nearer to the stars. And to the moon—the Full Moon of the year is at 10.8 p.m."

"And tonight the Eagle rides high in the heavens," Luna whispered.

"The Eagle's Nest!" cried Hitler. "I have not been there for months."

"Let us go."

Hitler hesitated: then rang a bell. His orders were rapped out in staccato fashion: a car, at once; and a guard.

The night was brilliant, the starscape magnificent over the mountains: a keen wind from the east blew along the valley. The car ran smoothly over the private road, hacked out from the mountainside at fantastic expense. At the abrupt lacets the wind screamed and whistled, but the road was protected by banks and walls—just as well, or the car might have been blown over the precipice edge.

Now the car was facing the mountain slope, head-on. Immediately in front Zodiuss saw an enormous door, ornamented with brass studs. From the darkness there appeared three men in S.S. uniform. They rushed to the door, sliding it open on smooth-running wheels. The car passed into an eerie tunnel, dimly illuminated with purple torches. For all the concentrated seriousness of the moment, Zodiuss was strongly reminded of the atmosphere of Grimm's fairy tales.

Now the car halted again. Here was an elevator of considerable size, comfortably upholstered in red leather. Its ascent of the final three hundred feet was smooth and rapid.

They stepped out of its enclosure into the light of the moon. Brilliantly illumined in the clear rays, there stood before them the Eagle's Nest, Hitler's private retreat. He had originally planned it as his crypt, Zodiuss recalled, but its architecture was not impressive. Glass appeared to be an important feature of its construction: it might have been a prosperous refreshment house.

In the shadow lurked uniformed men, unobtrusive guards. Hitler led the way through an open door, across a hall, into a large room. Its further wall was entirely made up of windows. There was no reason why a light should be put on, for the strong rays of the moon poured into the room.

Zodius and Luna stood by the window. Immediately outside the rock fell away in a sheer drop of 3,000 feet. In the near distance towered the neighbouring peaks of the Bavarian Alps, lovely in the soft light and deep shadow.

Luna walked across to Hitler and laid her hands on his wrist.

"Only a man who knew the heavens could conceive a retreat like this," she said, gently.

He smiled—and, as he smiled, his face was changed. Now his confidence seemed to return. After a moment of doubt, he switched on a dim crimson light: its contrast with the outside brilliance was startling.

"You are right," Hitler said. "Here a man can breathe. I must come here more frequently. Once inspiration used to seek me out here."

"I understand, very well."

"And now, Herr Professor," Hitler said, far more briskly than he had spoken throughout the evening, "I should like to hear of your new theory."

"It is but a development of the old, *mein Führer*. And it is still far from complete. Yet it cannot be doubted. Look at that moon—who would dare to say that such a power has no influence on earth? Not you, *mein Führer*, who has so often followed the advice of the moon, and has marched to success."

"You are right."

"So I begin with the power of the moon. Because it has been studied for so long, our records are more complete. We can prove the effects of the moon's influence. The ancients suspected it. If the moon can affect the tides, why not the mind of man? Then they proved that the moon did affect the mind—particularly the mind on the verge of insanity or genius. If the mind, why not the body? So we begin our thesis.

"Now scientists, as a basis for their discoveries, study the simplest forms of life. Thus I, too, begin. You have heard of the strange habit of the Palolo?"

"No. What is that?"

"The Palolo is a sea worm, found only in the Pacific near Samoa. Its method of reproduction is peculiar: it detaches its tail, which contains the generative organs, and the tail floats like a spawn on the surface of the sea. Now this is the point: the Palolo always spawns in October or November when the last quarter of the moon is due, and only then. At least, there have been occasions when the

worm has mistaken the month and has spawned in February, but *always* he has been faithful to the last quarter of the moon. On the night of the autumn moon the Samoan fishermen put to sea, for the tail of the Palolo is a delicacy. In the evening before the last quarter, the sea is clear: at sunrise the following morning it is a mass of floating tails."

Hitler was leaning forward eagerly: not without cause, for the story was interesting, and Zodius was telling it well.

"This is scientific fact, determined by two German investigators, Friedländer and Krämar, as far back as 1898. People have tried to explain away the remarkable phenomenon. It must be the light of the moon, one man said—but even on a cloudy night the Palolo still spawns at the correct time. Now, if the moon can influence a simple form of life like a small marine worm, why not the higher animals—and men?"

"Nor is the Palolo alone," Luna put in. "The sea-urchins of Suez always spawn at the full moon. So do many other forms of marine life."

"And the Moon's influence on plants is well known," Zodius continued. "The sap rises and falls with the waxing and waning of the Moon. If the Moon can control the powerful tides of the sea, why not the sap in plants—or the blood in men?"

"And in women," Luna whispered. "Any woman will tell you that her desire rises with the power and influence of the Moon."

Hitler was too fascinated to interrupt. Zodius allowed the drama of the silence to gather for a full minute, then continued.

"Save when there is artificial interference, a man is born when the stars decide. I explained to General Hoffmann that physical calculations can be wrong. The period of human gestation is ten moons—273·2 days. Yet, because we live such artificial lives, and because doctors so often interfere with the stages immediately prior to birth, this by itself is not a sufficient guide. Nor is a woman's estimate of her conception reliable, for the seed may not fertilise for hours or even days afterwards. So other calculations are essential. I do not pretend that our knowledge is yet perfect, but at least we advance.

"The physiological law of Ogino shows that a woman can only conceive on 65 days in her year. More important is the astrological Law of Glahn, which shows that normally a woman only conceives when the Moon is passing over the Ascendant or Descendant of her horoscope."

"This is very interesting!" Hitler said, his voice tense with the keenness of the student.

"So I begin to apply the principle to you, *mein Führer*. You permit?"

"Of course. Go on."

"My sister has prepared these horoscopes. Here is that of your father, born at Strones on June 7th, 1837. And of your mother, born at Spital on August 12th, 1860. An astrologer would have told your father that he would marry more than once, and your mother that she would marry a man older than herself."

"She was his third wife—and was twenty-three years younger than he was."

"Exactly. I note that, at your birth, your mother was 29, your father 52. This adds especial interest to the horoscopes. Had I been alive, I might have told your mother that she would have a son. She was born under Leo, dominated by the Sun—and the Sun has an affinity with males, the Moon with females. Her horoscope shows every sign of physical and moral strength—she should have been considerably more forceful than your father."

"She was."

"Napoleon and Mussolini were both born under Leo. Your father's sign is more intellectual. But at the moment we are concerned with your conceptional horoscope. You were born at 6.21 p.m. on April 20th, 1889. Calculating back the ten moons, this would give your conceptional date as June 30th, 1888, at about 11 p.m. But I have not been able to ascertain any details of your birth, so I have checked this figure with Glahn's Law. Now I have a clear reading. The Moon passed over your mother's ascendant twelve and a half hours earlier."

"What? In the morning?"

"Yes. Why not? Fertilisation can be delayed for hours or days. So I calculate your conceptional date to be June 30th, 1888, at about 10.30 a.m. And I have drawn up your horoscope for that moment."

"What does it show?" Hitler's query was eager.

"It is a remarkable proof of the theory that conceptional and natal horoscopes should be very similar, under perfect conditions. Again your ruling planet is Venus——"

"And yet my enemies claim that I am a man of brute force!"

"They cannot argue with such a horoscope. Yet your dominant planet is almost exactly opposed to your Ascendant. But most interesting are the conclusions about your life and health."

"Ah!" Now Zodiuss was playing on a known and established fear, and his victim responded eagerly.

"Your ruling planet is in Taurus, and is afflicted by Mars and Saturn. Taurus rules the neck and throat."

"It is always the same," Hitler whispered hoarsely.

"And you will note the opposition of Mercury to the Ascendant?"

Zodiuss said no more. Hitler was known to have an elementary knowledge of astrology. Zodiuss moved his finger gently over the horoscope, pointing also to the opposition of Mercury to Uranus. Hitler ought to know that Mercury is one of the significators of the brain, while Uranus influences the nerves. An amateur would read neurasthenia and nervous breakdown into such a combination.

But now Zodiuss judged the moment ripe to change the subject. It would have been an elementary mistake to flatter Hitler in the first moments of their interview, but Zodiuss calculated that his approach would inculcate a greater confidence. At the same time, it would not do to make his victim despondent: Hitler was fond of gloomy ruminations on his own early death, but the moment was scarcely opportune.

"Look," Zodiuss said, dramatically. "Here is one important variant in the conceptional horoscope—Venus is much stronger in relation to Mars."

"She is! She is! Then that means success in war?"

"I do not read it so—that follows from other considerations. I read it that you are to triumph over men of war. Since Venus and Mars are in the same house, it is certain that this means to say that the men of war are close to you."

"I knew it! I am destined to triumph over my own generals! I knew that it was fated!"

Hitler sprang to his feet in his excitement. His right foot began to stamp nervously on the carpet. (This is the involuntary movement—*Teppichfrasser*—which has been quite wrongly translated as "carpet chewer." Hitler does *not* lie down and chew carpets!)

Now Zodiuss knew that he was exploring certain ground. There is more than rumour in the stories of the quarrels between Hitler and his generals. They date back to well before the war—almost came to a head at the time of the march into the Rhineland in 1936. The generals wished to march as fervently as did Hitler, but were certain that France and Britain would mobilise—and they knew Germany was not ready for war. Hitler insisted that his intuition—or the guidance of his stars—was more accurate than his generals' calcula-

tions, and events proved him right. On subsequent occasions, too, his sense of timing was uncannily good, and many of the military party learned to esteem it.

Since the war had developed into serious fighting, however, they had reverted to more conventional ideas. Hitler's intuitions might be useful in duping stupid foreigners, but battles are won by tanks, planes and guns grouped in the right places at the right time. There had been a dozen fierce disputes. In the early stages of the war it seemed that Hitler's inspirations were infallible: the fact was, of course, that the force of German arms was so overwhelmingly preponderant that victory was almost certain in any circumstances. Now that the Allies were reinforced and powerfully armed, however, the generals preferred to trust to military science and power.

"I knew that I was right!" he exclaimed.

"You were right about the Russian campaign," Zodiuss suggested.

"I was. How did you know?"

"It is written in the stars," said Zodiuss—who had no idea as to what Hitler's plans in the Russian campaign had been.

Hitler held the horoscope in his hand: now Luna came to his side, so quietly that he started violently. For a man reported to be impervious to the influence of women, he seemed strangely disturbed by her strong and feminine personality.

"Look! Neptune in the tenth!" she whispered. "And squared by malefics in the East."

"How do you read that?"

"Moving West, there is safety in the protection of your own planet, conjoined by the Sun."

"Wait! You move beyond me—what does this mean?" he turned almost pathetically to Zodiuss.

"You have picked up another sheet, *mein Führer*," Zodiuss explained. "It is your progressed horoscope, cast not two hours ago. I read danger in the East, but movement to the West brings safety. See also these calculations around Stalin—note especially the culmination of Venus at Moscow—and Venus is your planet! Yes, there is danger there!"

"I see what that means—retreat in Russia!" Hitler muttered.

"Yours is an intellectual sign—you fight with your brain. Ground is a weapon, to be used as freely as tanks."

Again Hitler's foot was active, beating against the carpet. His agitation was apparent. Zodiuss knew quite well that Hitler was personally responsible for some of the German defeats in Russia

—that he had over-ridden the advice of his generals : at Stalingrad, for example, his obstinacy had prevented the rescue of at least a portion of the threatened Sixth Army. Yet it is always easy to persuade a man that he is not responsible for failure, and to place the blame elsewhere.

His ideas of retreat and dissension once planted, Zodiuss hastened to change the subject. Over-definite suggestions might do harm rather than good : further, the obvious policy of Zodiuss was to gain Hitler's confidence : after that, bigger results might follow.

Luna noted a significant nod.

"I sense danger from the south, brother," she said, almost wearily. "It is foreboding—I fear it."

"My sister is abnormally sensitive," Zodiuss explained. "Tonight, under the direct influence of the stars, and with the Moon at its height—listen !"

Luna stood by the window, surveying the brilliant glory of the March heavens. Apparently she was so absorbed that she had forgotten their presence : she was whispering, as if to herself.

"After the Sun's dominance, danger. When the Sun set, there was blood on the mountains."

"Leave her," said Zodiuss, quietly, as Hitler stared at the rigid figure of Luna. "Come to the table. This is why the stars sent me to you. I knew it. When my sister summoned me from Strasbourg, I knew it before she said. For months I have been watching the horoscope of Mussolini. You have seen it, of course."

"Yes." Nevertheless, Hitler picked up the sheet which Zodiuss indicated.

"Born at Dovia, July 19th, 1883 at 2 p.m.," the astrologer read out. "Scorpio rising : the Ascendant protected by the trine of Jupiter and Venus—but for this, he would have fallen to the bullet of one of his would-be assassins. Mars and Saturn in conjunction acting as malefics to the Moon in Gemini. Uranus dominates from the mid-heaven. The Sun is in the royal sign Leo—as with your mother. The ruler, Mars, in Gemini, in conjunction with the Moon and Saturn—from all these it is possible to read Mussolini's power, his militancy, his oratory. He has indeed fulfilled his horoscope. But there is a dangerous period here—his Ascendant is overshadowed."

"The fixed stars threaten !" came in a murmur from Luna.

"Look !" Zodiuss exclaimed, hoarsely. "Here is Regulus, one of the most powerful stars in the Lion, in the midheaven. And see

the progressed horoscope. After the rise of the Sun to its solstice in 1943, Regulus again appears, in greater strength than before. At the same time, in the weeks before Mussolini's birthday, his Ascendant is in bad aspect with malefics."

"But what does that mean? I know little of the fixed stars."

"Regulus indicates a rise to high position—but, when the support of the Sun is withdrawn, an abrupt fall, and sudden death."

"I do not want Mussolini to die!"

Zodius understood this sentiment very well. If sudden death comes to one dictator, it may approach another.

"The stars warn of danger, they do not decide. He can be saved—if he is warned."

Zodius allowed the idea to dominate the mind of Hitler. Carefully judging the moment, he produced yet a further chart.

"It is not merely a question of personal danger to Mussolini, but to our cause in Italy," he said, softly and slowly. "Look at this—the progressed horoscope of King Victor Emmanuel. On August 1st—the day of the New Moon—there is a partial eclipse of the Sun, in close conjunction with Jupiter. And that eclipse falls on the King's ascending degree—as certain an indication of heavy misfortune as astrology ever recognised!"

For many moments the silence was intense. Zodius was anxious: he was playing a dangerous game—not merely risky to himself, but in the ideas he was putting into Hitler's mind. At all costs he must avoid a dictatorial interpretation of his reading of the stars—far better to plant an idea, and let it expand in Hitler's own mind, nourished by his fears and apprehensions.

Potential danger in Italy must have been foreseen at least from the moment of the Allied landing in North Africa. It was the task of Zodius to influence Hitler's ideas to the disadvantage of his cause—subtly, and not directly. He might fail, for Hitler's mind was not normal, and might not calculate by conventional reasoning. Yet at least Zodius had apparently succeeded in his first objective—in gaining Hitler's confidence. The Führer stared fixedly at Mussolini's horoscope. Then he began to walk about the room: in his agitation the sweat poured from his face, although actually the air in the room was rather cool.

Suddenly he halted. "I shall go to see Mussolini," he announced.

Both men swung round abruptly at the sound of a gentle thud. Luna lay huddled on the carpet, in a dead faint.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THEY rushed to her side : Hitler was visibly agitated.

" I will summon help," he said.

" No ! Lift her—she will recover. It is just the intensity of her concentration. She frees herself from mundane influences, and in the moment of reversion there is often a period of blankness. It is not serious."

Very clumsily, Hitler helped to raise the recumbent form. Luna was placed in a chair, and almost at once revived.

" I am sorry," she smiled feebly, but her face was ashen.

" All is well, sister."

" There was conflict within me," she whispered. " The influence of the stars, and the force of a powerful human will beside me."

It might be that Hitler was too agitated to understand the purport to her reference to him, but the idea would doubtless recur.

" Let us go," he said, hoarsely.

" Yes. But one word, *mein Führer*. Before you see Mussolini, I have something else to say to you—to show you."

" What is it ?"

" Not now. Enough. The Moon has passed the zenith. Let us return to earth."

Hitler spoke no word as they returned to the Haus Wachenfeld, and was obviously ill at ease. He said goodnight very awkwardly, and an orderly led them at once to their suite of rooms. Refreshments awaited them, but both Zodius and Luna first relaxed in their chairs. The strain of the initial and vital interview had been considerable. So far as they could judge, it had been a success, but danger constantly threatened.

They were silent in their condition of mental fatigue. Apart from that, they would not have talked. They might be Hitler's guests, but Himmler would still be curious about them. As they recovered their energy, they exchanged commonplace conversation : if a Gestapo agent listened, he would get no news.

They separated to their rooms : she said no word, but he understood her glance. An hour had passed before he opened her door. As he had argued, since her room had been prepared after their arrival, there was less chance of a trap. In any case, the dangers of a microphone picking up a conversation can be greatly exaggerated. In the lounge, it might be, a dozen leads might have been inserted in

different parts of the room, and a conversation in ordinary voices might possibly be picked up. Here, in Luna's bedroom, the risk was small. Even if the trap had been prepared, a listener would only hear a whispered murmur. His worst conclusion would be that Zodius and Luna were not brother and sister, but lovers.

"Well, and what do you think of the great Führer?" he asked.

"How insipid he is! It is almost incredible that he should be what he is!"

"Yes. No man in history ever accomplished so much on so little."

"But the power we have heard about—the personal magnetism—where is it?"

"It may be obscured by the fog of war. Or it may never have existed. Maybe Germany has been a victim of mass hallucination. Of course, Hitler preached what nearly all Germans wanted to believe."

"That is it. So he could stir the crowds to frenzy, though his individual personality is weak. And how feeble he is with women! No wonder he has never married—he is afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Yes. A strong woman would dominate him with ease, as his mother used to do. His mind is warped, but weak. I would undertake to seduce him tomorrow, were it necessary for our cause."

"It will not be necessary, sister. I believe that I can see the way ahead."

"You were magnificent! Already I can perceive the confusion in his mind."

"Yes. That is our objective. We must be careful—all our suggestions should be oblique, not direct. We have planted some useful ideas: if we can set him against his generals, there alone we have won a major victory. However, this is only the beginning. We need rest—nobody can say what tomorrow will bring to us—not even our own stars."

In the darkness her hands sought his shoulders: her arms encompassed his body. For one moment her lips were pressed on his.

"Goodnight, brother!" she whispered.

It was long after daylight when an orderly disturbed their rest with coffee and rolls: real coffee, they noted, not the ersatz material inflicted upon the German population. They had an hour or more of leisure, for Hitler never gets up before ten o'clock.

"Will he send for us again?" Luna asked. "His curiosity was intrigued by what you said about showing him something."

"He will be thinking too hard over the ideas we planted. I would guess that he has had a restless night. In any case, we will attempt no experiments by day. It is easier to act a part in artificial light."

An hour later there appeared at the door the adjutant who had conveyed them from Breslau.

"What is your wish?" he asked, rather abruptly. "You may walk on the mountains. Or there is a car at your disposal."

"I would like to go to the Königsee," said Luna.

"Very well. I will arrange it. In half an hour."

They drove to the Königsee, the King's Lake, one of the loveliest water scenes of Europe. A motor boat awaited them, and they moved gently over the calm surface, revelling in the vista of mountains descending abruptly to the water's edge. Then a breeze from the east freshened the air, and began to form tiny wavelets on the surface of the water. The atmosphere and scene were alike exhilarating: the only disturbing feature was the presence of the adjutant. Evidently Hitler's guests might do as they wished—but not alone.

In the afternoon they rested, but in the evening came another summons. *Zodius* fought for control: one success in such conditions does not necessarily breed confidence, but reveals the immensities of threatening dangers. But this time the orderly did not lead the way to Hitler's study: instead, they found themselves in a drawing-room.

Immediately a woman greeted them. From pictures in the illustrated magazines they recognised her: this was Henny, wife of Reich Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach, friend of Frau Hoffmann. She prattled to them easily: here, obviously was a friend.

Evidently Hitler wished to parade his new acquisition. Many well-known men and woman were present. Contrary to popular superstition, Goering wore no medals—presumably he keeps them back for public occasions. There are some who profess to see in him an attractive personality, but *Zodius* was repelled. Luna confessed later that the sight of his bloated body and profligate nervous eyes caused her to shudder.

Standing on the other side of the room was Himmler, grave and bespectacled: there was a frightening coldness in his glance, even though this was a social occasion. He was in conversation with

General Jöhl, Hitler's private military adviser. Equally repulsive were the personalities of Ribbentrop and Goebbels.

Of the women present, Luna took especial note of Fraulein Theresa von Thorn, daughter of a famous Bavarian family which helped Hitler in his early days of political struggle. By popular report, she was Hitler's mistress, but Luna saw no sign which would confirm or deny the current rumour.

Luna, incidentally, kept well in the background. With her face and figure she might easily have attracted the men—but would have antagonised the women. She was prepared to support Zodius if he needed her: until such time, she talked gravely to an elderly officer who looked like a professor in uniform.

Everyone was staring at Zodius. Evidently the palace telegraph had done its work: all the people present seemed to know a lot about him—Luna's companion revealed in his questions a wide acquaintance with Zodius' reputation. Without doubt every person in the house knew that Hitler had spent two hours with this famous astrologer on the previous evening. This alone was enough to pique their curiosity.

Lester had decided on his policy. Even before he left London, he had studied the careers of Hitler's previous astrologers, who had come to unfortunate ends. He gathered that they had been ordinary practitioners who were overcome by their success—very humble and servile when confronted with their Führer and his companions of power.

He exchanged greetings civilly but gravely with the friends of Frau von Schirach, who acted as his introducer. Refreshments were served. Zodius noticed that Hitler drank a glass of hot milk. (He used to drink beer, but gave it up when he found that it made him fat: Goering still drinks beer!) Special sandwiches of local cheese were served to him: he is a vegetarian—he used to explain that he could not bear to think of the slaughter of animals. The murder of humans apparently evokes no such mental protests.*

Evidently something was expected of Zodius. He was determined not to do the conventional tricks of the lionised-astrologer: at the same time, if necessary he was prepared to take serious risks: Hitler was obviously a man susceptible to personal influence—and

* I once met Czernochemski, the Macedonian terrorist who, under Italian and Croat direction, assassinated King Alexander of Yugoslavia. He had over thirty murders to his "credit," but explained that he also was a vegetarian because he could not bear to think of animals' suffering! D.B.

these people were his close associates. The power of Zodiacus must be undimmed. His strong personality was obviously having an effect—people were comparing it mentally with the feeble humility of his predecessors.

"Do tell us, Herr Professor," Frau von Schirach chattered, as a little circle gathered round him, "when does victory come to us?"

"When we have faith, we shall deserve it," he said shortly.

"But what do the stars say?" she persisted.

"They say that men are fools, who do not understand."

This was evidently not what was expected, Zodiacus noted with pleasure. Yet, while impressing them with his independence, it was important not to antagonise them.

"Tonight the Moon is past the full, with Neptune in opposition. Yesterday the Sun entered Aries. There threatens difficulty in the East, but from the West comes aid. There is someone here who needs me."

He judged the moment ripe to play a high card. Luna advanced and took his arm. All conversation was hushed as they moved slowly about the room, the vivid contrast in their striking personalities dominating the assembly. Zodiacus left the direction to Luna, whose gentle pressure guided him. She, by long study, was much better acquainted with Hitler's intimates than ever Zodiacus could be.

We have already noted that his preparations in England had been very thorough. Colonel Metcalfe had sought out all possible details of the people round Hitler, and any useful notes about them. Some of these had already proved of value: others were retained for use at important moments: Zodiacus judged that one of these had arrived.

Luna halted before a middle-aged woman: it did not need the sensitive nature of a seer to perceive the grief in her eyes.

As she halted, Luna sank to the ground and placed her hands on the woman's wrists. Now the scene was set for the play.

"Dear lady, the fates are ruthless when they are unkind," Zodiacus began, using every quality of his attractive voice. "Some are gone who can never return."

She burst into tears: Zodiacus hated himself for his play on her grief, but she offered his only opportunity. He knew that she had already lost two of her sons.

"But one will return!" he said firmly. "You hear me, one will return!"

She screamed : Luna's arm encompassed her waist.

" My son ! " the woman whispered.

" He will return ! "

Again her tears flowed, but it seemed that she believed him, for she pressed his hand gratefully. There was a sympathetic murmur among the women : but suddenly Zodiuss turned on the company.

" There are adverse influences here," he said, sharply. " Come, sister, let us go."

" No, no ! " the woman pleaded.

" I will not be treated as a charlatan ! "

" But, Herr Professor, nobody even suggested——" Frau von Schirach began.

" They thought it. I challenge them now. This is what they are thinking : ' He does the usual parlour tricks. He knows that the third and last son of Frau Wetterstein is missing after a raid over England. How easy to gain cheap thanks by promising his return ! How cheap to prophesy what people want to believe ! ' You fools, are you human ? Do you think that I would trade on the grief of this dear lady ? Do you think that I guess ? I tell you that I follow the guidance of the stars."

" Tell me—tell me——" Frau Wetterstein began.

" Wait, dear lady. You, fools and doubters, think that I guess by chance. Now you shall listen to me. Frau Hoffmann told me of the sad case of her friend, Frau Wetterstein. She asked me to help, should I meet her. I took details, and cast the boy's horoscope. Had those in command followed the guidance of the stars, the boy would never have been harmed. Always his path through the sky to the East was clear, while that to the West was clouded. So, instead of using him in Russia, you sent him to fly over to England ! He did not return. But he will. The line of his life is clear. On the night he flew, there were many malefics, but his Ascendant was still strong. Dear lady, I tell you that your son is alive : it may be that he cannot speak—Gemini was afflicted by the malefic influences of Mars and Saturn in trine. Maybe his mind is confused. You must ask about your son."

" But I have asked, Herr Professor ! " she cried, tearfully. " Always I am told that there is no news."

" If he cannot speak, maybe no one knows who he is," Zodiuss retorted. " In a crash, evidence of identity may be lost. That I do not know, but I *do* know that your son is alive. You——" he turned to the group of men, now listening seriously. " Busy your-

selves in relieving this dear lady's grief. There are telephones and radios. Come, sister, let us go."

"Just a minute, Herr Professor." It was Hitler who stood before them.

"*Mein Führer*, my body and soul are yours, but my mind is at the service of my science: and, through it, of you. These people are your guests. Some of them doubt me. I cannot work in such an atmosphere. No sensitive mind can operate in a well of suspicion. I am at your command, but I am not under the orders of those who would mock at me, who would treat me like a parlour conjurer. I have said that Frau Wetterstein's son is alive. There are methods of finding out if I am right. If I am wrong, then I have misread the message of the stars—I am not a charlatan, but a fool. As such, I am unworthy to be near you—I will return to my home within the hour. If I am right, I shall await the apologies of those who sneered. I shall wait in my room. You will send for me when you need me. It may be tonight, or it may be tomorrow—but I swear, *mein Führer*, that you shall send for me! Come, sister!"

The ranks of the guests parted. In deadly silence the two dominating personalities moved towards the door. If popular report is to be trusted, Hitler's entourage has witnessed many surprising scenes, but none more amazing or dramatic than this: for a full minute after the door had closed, the silence was intense: then it was broken by the sobs of Frau Wetterstein.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

LUNA's eyes revealed her admiration of Zodius' nerve as the door of their room closed behind them. She said no word as she took his hand.

"Let us rest, sister," Zodius said, in a clear voice, which could not have been missed had anyone been listening. "We may have to wait for some hours."

It was not difficult to picture what was happening in the saloon they had left. Spurred on by the grief of Frau Wetterstein, or maybe impressed by the astrologer's confidence and sincerity, someone of importance—maybe Ribbentrop himself—would even now

be making an urgent call to the German minister in Switzerland or Portugal. Yes, previous inquiries about young Karl Wetterstein had failed, but the subject must be tackled from a new angle. The emissary of the Protecting Power should ascertain if any unidentified German airman were in a British hospital, maybe with a head injury which forbade speech. If so, did he answer to the following description—

Naturally, Zodius could have given many more details—including the name of the hospital near Ely where young Wetterstein lay. The German had been shot down a week before Lester left England : all the rest of the bomber crew were killed. Actually, in spite of his severe injuries, Wetterstein was at once identified. It was a very keen Intelligence Officer who had remarked that he was the son of a well-known friend of Hitler's : nor was the opportunity wasted on the astute Colonel Metcalfe. The pseudo-astrologer was well primed with a dozen " prophecies " for use on important occasions. The news of Wetterstein was deliberately held back—until an urgent message arrived, when it would be revealed.

Normally the message might have reached London within the hour, but war is disruptive of communications. It was certain that the whole weight of official German priorities followed the inquiry across Europe.

Never had the strain been so intolerable. Zodius had made his decision on the spur of the moment ; it was not hostility which he sensed, but contempt : or, at least, opposition directed against the potential influence he might exert on the Führer, and on the belief that he was yet another charlatan. He judged that a decisive victory over these people was vital : already his personality, entirely opposed to the servility of his predecessors, had made a considerable impression. Now it was essential to gain a position of vantage.

The hours passed : no sound entered the suite of rooms. Zodius crept softly into Luna's bedroom, and they conversed in whispers. Her apprehensions were more marked than his.

" It is easy to deal with Hitler—especially as we are well prepared," she said. " But a crowd like that—any trifle might wreck our plan. You were right—we have enemies among them."

" Wait a few hours. They will be licking our shoes. We had Hitler convinced of our powers last night. Now we offer demonstrable and practical proof. He will be delighted because he was right."

" I still admire your courage in standing up to defy them all."

"I had not noticed that you were especially meek and humble, sister!"

"I am only copying your fashion—I draw strength from you. I could never play this part without you."

"Nor I without you. Let us rest. I foresee a very active half hour!"

"It is after eleven o'clock. Even if they have got their inquiries through to London, surely they will get no information at this hour of night?"

"War Offices and Air Ministries never close in wartime. Nor does the Foreign Office—or the neutral Legations. With the force behind the inquiry which I anticipate, the right answer can be found."

She seemed to draw strength from his calm confidence. A violent rainstorm opened suddenly, its particles rattling on the window panes. It cleared just as abruptly: the clouds passed over the dark mountains, revealing a magnificent starscape.

The room was in darkness: Luna stood at the window, gazing out.

"The world is so lovely. If only man fitted his home. These *fürherers* and *duce*—why cannot they learn from Nature? They try to regiment the people of the world—they cannot learn from the mountains each unlike its neighbour. In a few wicked years they themselves will be no more than dust, scattered on the mountainside. And other dictators, more beneficent but equally wrong, would persuade us that all men are equal—that none rise above the rest as the mountains above the valleys. Both these features are necessary to human existence: the mountains for the hard stone—and for beauty: the valleys for fertility and homes."

"The valleys for peace, the mountains for freedom," he added.

"Yes, there was never slavery on the heights. Strange that Hitler should choose the mountains as his home!"

"It is to escape from the world he has made. He is a man afraid of his own creation—you can read that in his eyes: he is not so fearful of war and suffering as of those whom war has made powerful."

"You mean—the military clique?"

"Yes. They are the real rulers of Germany today. In a quarrel with Hitler, they would win."

"And your policy is to promote that quarrel?"

"Yes. They would win—but they could never replace Hitler in

the affections of the German people. His fall would be a resounding blow to German morale : maybe a vital blow."

"He looks like a sick man."

"He is—diseased of the mind. Yet he must not die—yet."

"What ? I could willingly kill him for the misery he has brought upon the world."

"No—not yet. We could have killed him last night, with ease. But then he would have become a martyr—and the power of a martyr is far greater than that of a living man : even of a living saint. Hitler must not die until the German people are ready to demand his life."

"And if the Junkers seize power, does that end the war ?"

"No. But they will perceive that they cannot win the war—although they have not lost it. They will try to call off this war as a draw—so as to begin their preparations for the next."

"The prospect is not easy."

"Only if we are weak. With faith and hope, we have nothing to fear : especially if the United Nations become really united—not merely in their determination to defeat Germany, but to collaborate in the rehabilitation of Europe."

"That is the great fear. In Poland and the Balkans, the fear is of Russia rather than of Germany—not of military conquest, but of dependencies established by subtle intrigue. These puppet Polish and Yugoslav organisations maintained in Moscow—you have no idea how the Germans use them to play upon the fears of our peoples."

"Maybe I have. That is why I pray for unity of purpose in peace as well as in war. But this will not do, sister. I note that your thoughts have strayed to the perils and sufferings of your own country. In a few moments we ourselves will be facing intimate perils."

"It is much easier to suffer yourself than to think of the agony of others."

Now he stood beside her in front of the window, his arm about her shoulders.

"Think of something else," he said. "Did you notice how Goering looked at Himmler ?"

"Indeed I did ! There was no friendship there."

"No. It confirmed another idea for exploitation. I might be able to provoke a quarrel between them. Nostradamus will be of considerable assistance, I fancy."

"You are holding back your parchments?"

"Not for very much longer. You are right in this—every moment is one of danger. We cannot remain here indefinitely. When we have firmly planted the ideas we mean to spread, and have begun to see their effects beginning to show, then——"

He was interrupted by a loud knock at the door. He passed into the lounge and switched on the light. Count Baldur von Schirach was there, supporting his wife, who was almost delirious in her excitement.

"Herr Professor!" she cried, her voice shrill with emotion. "You——"

"I will return," he announced, before she could complete a sentence.

As Zodius and Luna approached the salon, they could hear the excited buzz of conversation. It ceased abruptly as they entered. For a moment the silence was profound, but the atmosphere was completely different. Zodius surveyed the scene, calmly and confidently.

Frau Wetterstein staggered towards him, weak with emotion.

"God bless you!" she gasped. "My son is alive!"

"So the stars told me, dear lady. For myself, I did not know."

Now he was surrounded by an eager crowd, trying to shake him by the hand. Hitler stood on one side, a smile of triumph on his face. His smile suggested that he himself had made the prophecy! Actually, it reflected his self-satisfaction: his judgment was justified—now even his friends could no longer doubt the wonders of astrology.

Zodius pushed his admirers on one side roughly.

"It was nothing," he announced. "I only told you what any student of astrology could have told, given accurate data. One day a leader will arise who will follow the guidance of the stars whatever human wisdom may say. It may be that he is here already. I shall be proud to serve him. And now, goodnight."

The women pressed him to remain, but he paid no heed. As he walked with dignity towards the door, the hands of a dozen men were offered to him. One was that of Himmler. For an imperceptible second Zodius halted.

"I have something to say to you. Tomorrow," he whispered: then passed on immediately.

Footsteps sounded as they crossed the hall. At a sudden call Zodius and Luna halted.

Hitler approached them, almost at a trot. He held out an enthusiastic hand.

"It may be that I have been waiting for you," he said. "I have often been warned of a new influence which would enter my life."

"Certainly I have been directed to you, *mein Führer*."

"Tomorrow I leave for Eastern Headquarters—I have something to say there. Then I return here—to see you again before I meet Mussolini."

Luna took the arm of Zodius as they moved on. Though she had played but a minor part in the drama of the evening, the strain on her nervous energy had been colossal. He supported her gently: then, closing the door, almost carried her to her room.

They were both asleep when the maid brought in their coffee and rolls the following morning. Obviously they were likely to be mobbed by the members of the house-party: they planned to avoid them—a walk on the mountains promised relief and exhilaration. Early rising was apparently no habit at the Haus Wachenfeld, and Zodius and Luna were out in the open before anybody was about.

An armed guard trailed behind them—apparently this was the custom. They beckoned him to their side and invited him to lead them along the mountain paths. Soon he forgot to keep up his pose of a stern, unrelenting man of force. He was a Bavarian who loved his mountains, and Zodius' appreciation won his heart: quickly Luna had him chatting about his father and mother.

Quite discreetly, he did put several indirect questions about the events of the previous evening—again palace gossip had been very effective. Zodius passed them over without comment.

They gained a view-point on the Obersalzberg and halted to eat the meat and rolls they carried with them. The panorama was magnificent, the natural glory of the mountains and the massive heaps of cloud enhanced by comparison with a few puny wreaths of smoke emanating from the hidden chimneys of Berchtesgaden.

Suddenly their guide sprang to his feet and gazed hard into the valley.

"There is a signal from below. We must return," he announced.

He would have hurried them off, but they lingered deliberately. Half-way down the mountainside a uniformed S.S. man advanced towards them.

"I have been looking for you, Herr Professor," he announced.

"Herr Himmler and Dr. Hoerman wish to see you."

"Very well. We were returning to the house. We will follow

you and your friend," Zodius said, casually. But, when they were out of earshot, he whispered to Luna: "Dr. Hoerman? Who is he—the name seems familiar?"

"He is the man Himmler appointed to take charge of the Occult Section of the Health Department. What does he want? I am afraid!"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE moment was admittedly nervous. The obvious inference was that Himmler had summoned his occult specialist to "vet" the new claimants to Hitler's confidence. There might be serious danger: easy enough to deceive emotional women or even supercilious men, but a man who was presumably an expert in astrology and its kindred subjects! Yet by this time Zodius was keenly confident, and the episode of the previous evening persuaded him that he had nothing to fear—for the moment: acute danger might threaten later.

Sure enough, Dr. Hoerman's greeting was cordial enough. From his first sentences it was obvious that he knew something of the reputation of Professor Zodius of Strasbourg: he made casual references to the Conference of German Astrologers. It was equally obvious that he knew of the secondary activities of Zodius, from the Gestapo records.

"I have long wanted to meet you, Herr Professor," he beamed. "I am most grateful to Herr Himmler for this opportunity. I understand that you have already made a profound impression on the Führer."

"Last night was trivial," Lester replied.

"I meant the night before last. Doubtless you were considering the Full Moon of the Year?"

"Exactly, Herr Doctor."

"And what were your conclusions?"

At least Dr. Hoerman was direct, and no adept at diplomatic finesse. Zodius was silent, but Hoerman charged in again.

"I am sure that Herr Himmler would be most interested to hear of your deductions," he said.

From the vocal inflection as he pronounced the name, Hoerman betrayed himself as Himmler's man: this was very useful knowledge.

"You whispered last night that you had something to say to me,"

Himmler commented : there was an eagerness in his tone, scarcely repressed by his natural caution.

"I have," said Zodius slowly. "And I am very glad that Dr. Hoerman is present to hear it. For many years it has been my hobby to watch the careers of famous men, and to compare them with my readings of the stars. It is no surprise to me, Herr Himmler, that you have attained front rank. I have known it for long. Not only from the stars. Like Dr. Hoerman, I have studied the occult. More than once I have been tempted to write to you—years ago. Yet I refrained. You did not know me : Europe was filled with charlatans, and in your eyes I might be one of their number. And my own stars indicated that I might meet you under conditions of confidence. It may be that this moment has arrived."

"Go on," Himmler muttered, hoarsely.

"Dr. Hoerman, you know the story of the French priest, Montigny ?" Zodius said abruptly.

"You mean the man who is supposed to have taken and lost some of the Nostradamus documents ?"

"Yes."

"Of course, I know of him."

"I have found some of the missing parchments."

"What ?" Hoerman's eyes were shining with excitement. His official post might be designated to put down occultists, but it was apparent that he had a professional interest, too.

Simply but dramatically Zodius told the story of his purchase of the six drums of the National Guard of Strasbourg. Hoerman could scarcely repress his excitement : and when finally Zodius brought out the parchments, his visitor sprang to his feet and rushed to handle them.

"My dear Herr Professor, this is wonderful !" he cried. "I congratulate you—this is most interesting ! Ah—if I am not mistaken I see here some of the prose prophecies of Nostradamus ! Look at this ! I have long suspected that the *sixtains* were not exactly forgeries—some students suspect Jean Armé de Chavigny——"

"Or Vincent Sève of Beaucaire," Zodius put in.

"But from these notes the truth becomes obvious—the *sixtains* are the prose prophecies of Nostradamus versified by another hand."

"I agree, Dr. Hoerman. The six-lined verses are in quite a different style from the usual quatrains of the *Centuries*. They are more poetical, more leisured."

"Yes. I am almost certain that I can point to the *sixains* which are based upon these notes. It may be that we shall have to acquit both Séve and Chavigny—maybe this Montigny was the man who transposed these thoughts into poetry. My dear Professor Zodius, this is an antiquarian discovery of the greatest interest."

"I should be very glad of your assistance in its detailed examination, Dr. Hoerman. Your resources are so much wider than mine."

"Why, I shall be delighted, of course!" His voice was as happy and exultant as that of a schoolboy returning home for the holidays. His professional interest was thoroughly aroused. Not for one minute did he seem to have any suspicion as to the genuineness of the parchments. Zodius' story was not unprecedented, and it was backed by his personality. Further, as Wernski had claimed, the parchments were most artistic and convincing forgeries.

"Gentlemen, this is doubtless very interesting, but how does it affect me?" Himmler was plainly impatient: the outsider finds nothing so boring as the shop talk of experts.

Hoerman plunged into an account of the work of Nostradamus, with particular reference to the documents known to be missing. He was remarkably well informed, Zodius noted; but Himmler was in no mood for a historical discourse.

"We will continue our very interesting discussion later, I suggest, Dr. Hoerman," Zodius put in, at the right moment. "I wish to draw your attention to this very important fact. From these parchments I have already identified 17 of the missing 58 quatrains——"

"What? I must say——"

"There may be one or two more," Zodius charged on, "but the beating of the drums had destroyed many lines of writing. But among the 17 is one of especial interest to Herr Himmler. This one."

Himmler grabbed the parchment eagerly: his disappointed look reflected his lack of understanding.

"What does it mean?"

"Nostradamus made his prophecies in doggerel rhymes of four lines," Zodius explained. "They were often obscure. He wrote in archaic French, often using abbreviations. This is the quatrain I wished to show you."

Himmler stared at it. "I do not understand it!" he cried.

Zodius read out the quatrain simply and carefully :

' Mourra le noir de la Grand Germanie
Son heritage sera tost† disputé.
Le Grand perdue la course qu'il envie,
Par le savant de fer tout est gagné.'*

" Yes, but what does it mean ? " Himmler implored.

" I would translate it like this :

*' The leader of the Great Germany will die
His heritage will soon be disputed.
The large one will lose the race he would win,
All is gained by the wise man of iron.'*

" Ah! " Dr. Hoerman exclaimed ; "this is indeed interesting, Herr Himmler ! "

" The large one will lose the race—does that mean Goering ? "

" Of course. The professor is being polite. The word might be translated, the ' fat one.' "

" And the iron man who knows ? "

" Well, Herr Himmler, you have a reputation for stern conduct—and you certainly know a great deal about the others ! "

" I see," Himmler muttered. Then, after a pause : " Has the Führer seen this ? "

" Not yet. I was awaiting a suitable opportunity—I wanted you to see it first. I am especially glad that Dr. Hoerman should see it as well."

" You are discreet as well as clever, Professor Zodius," Hoerman smiled.

" Say nothing of this to the Führer—not yet ! " Himmler ordered.

Zodius bowed acquiescence. Himmler obviously wanted to make some preliminary preparations of his own !

The scheme was progressing perfectly. A feud between Hitler and his generals, accompanied at the same time by another between Goering and Himmler, should have serious effects. The German people had always looked upon Goering as the natural successor to Hitler—Goering had consistently built up a happy-go-lucky kind of popularity. The people would never have in him one-tenth of the confidence they gave to Hitler, but at least they liked him. But Himmler, the dreaded chief of the Gestapo ! If he were to become

* *Le noir*—the head, or leader.

† *Tost*—soon.

Führer of the Reich, who would know happiness? The suggestion would be *very* unpopular—not even Hitler could make it and get a ready response. Yes, Zodius mused, the scheme promised great dividends in confusion and mistrust, and he was very satisfied with its progress.

Dr. Hoerman was still prattling about the parchment, but Himmler scarcely seemed to be listening—he was probably working out preliminary plans for his bid for leadership. Naturally, the idea was not new—it has long been known that he is very ambitious. Zodius based all his plans on ideas actually in being—far stronger than the invention of new ones.

Luna saw that the moment had come to break off the conversation—in which she had played no part, remaining in the background. Now she moved towards the group, and her very presence was sufficient to disturb the train of thought. Hoerman broke off abruptly.

"Oh, by the way, Herr Professor," he said. "I return to Munich tomorrow morning, and in the afternoon I have to go out to Allerheiligen. You would doubtless like to come with me?"

"Er—of course," Zodius replied abruptly, wondering what on earth Allerheiligen was.

Luna's quick wit saved his confusion. "Ugh! I do not like lunatic asylums!" she whispered.

So Allerheiligen was a lunatic asylum! But why should he be expected to go there? Hoerman's next sentence seemed to provide the answer.

"I have been conducting some experiments there which I am sure will interest you," he said. "One of my assistants has been working on the researches of Arrhenius, particularly on his discoveries that the periods of epileptic crisis follow the 27·32 days of the tropical revolution of the Moon. My assistant has already obtained some remarkable results in his observations on the insane at various phases of the Moon in conjunction with her position in the Zodiac."

Zodius, much relieved, professed keen interest. A few minutes later, the two visitors withdrew. Himmler was still holding the parchment in his hand, but Zodius took it gently but firmly from him.

"Let us go out again," he said to Luna, as soon as they were alone. It was good policy to keep clear of all the other visitors, who would be certain to demand more demonstrations of the astrologer's astonishing powers.

The following day they motored with Dr. Hoerman to Munich, and thence to Allerheiligen. Zodius and Luna examined the observed results of the experiments with professional enthusiasm—actually, they were indeed very interesting, but not sufficiently conclusive to be taken into account as a basis for a serious thesis. Three or four of the patients were brought in for personal examination by Zodius—and Hoerman and his assistant were obviously impressed by his questions and comments.

"Case No. 7," Dr. Hoerman announced. "Ah, I am certain that Professor Zodius would like to carry out this interview alone."

With a dramatic gesture, he almost drove Luna and his assistant out of the room before him. Zodius was completely bewildered: he had not the faintest idea what lay behind Hoerman's suggestion.

An attendant opened the door, and admitted the patient: a woman. Zodius indicated the interview chair, and she occupied it without a word—evidently this was the accepted procedure. Zodius skimmed the details of the case card: mental amnesia was the diagnosis. According to Hoerman's assistant, there was a definite connection between the strength of the disease and that of the Moon.

"You feel well?" Zodius asked.

"Oh, very well," she replied, in a normal voice. Indeed, she was a picture of physical health—a well-developed woman of about forty.

"You are happy here?"

"Sometimes."

"I see. You do not like the Moon?"

"No," she whispered. "And I do not like the stars."

"Why not? They do not harm you."

"They do. They hurt. Not all of them—some are friendly. But they are too close. They are on the wall behind my bed. I dream of them, and they frighten me."

"You must not be afraid." He did not need medical experience to perceive the character of her hallucinations. "They treat you kindly here?"

"Oh, yes. But they are women, most of them. The men are strange—all in white coats. I like dark things. I like your suit." She got up and advanced towards him. "Oh!"

"What is the matter?"

"There are stars on your suit—all over it!"

This was remarkable, Zodius pondered. In her madness, by some method she had sensed his connection with astrology.

"They will not hurt you," he said, gently. "Come nearer, and you will see that they do not hurt you."

Nervously she moved towards him. Now her hands stretched out and touched his jacket.

"They have gone," she whispered. "You are a nice man."

Now her hand was stroking his cheek : next running through his long hair. Her actions were normal to her type—in a woman's ward, sexual promptings mingle strangely with existing mental disorders.

"You are a very nice man," she repeated. Now, without hesitation, she embraced him, her lips pressed warmly on his. As if spurred by the contact, her embrace became more passionate. But suddenly she broke away, in a storm of tears.

Desperately sorry for the poor woman, Zodiuss judged it kind to end the interview. He rang the bell, and the attendant led the sobbing woman away.

Nevertheless, Zodiuss was still showing signs of the strain of the affecting scene when Hoerman returned.

"Do not be distressed, Herr Professor," the doctor said. "I assure you that your wife is well cared for."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

ZODIUS was conscious of a great sense of relief, as of an escape from disaster. A casual phrase, mistakenly uttered, might have led to his doom.

So this was the secret of the astrologer's wife ! Small wonder that no records remained in the house at Strasbourg. It was pathetic to recall the incidents of the conversation—especially how the unhappy woman had called him a "nice man," and had nestled close to him, not knowing that he was supposed to be her husband.

This silence was intercepted sympathetically. Dr. Hoerman only made one further comment. "I suppose that your wife did not recognise you ?"

"No—no sign." Zodiuss decided that she should have no further opportunity ! Already his position was precarious enough, without the complication of an insane wife. However, it was obvious that no further action was expected of him, and he was content to leave

well alone. Dr. Hoerman would probably imagine that Zodius had "consoled himself" with Luna because of his wife's unfortunate and incurable illness.

Zodius and Luna travelled back to Berchtesgaden, Hoerman remaining in Munich. Hitler was likely to be away for some days, they learned. Some of their admirers clamoured that they should enter into the social life of the house. Zodius agreed—emphasising its social side: he was not prepared to do parlour tricks, he insisted.

The company was ordinary enough. It seemed that the sexual excesses which have disfigured the Nazi party were suppressed or at least restrained in Hitler's immediate entourage. In the evening a card-party was arranged: Zodius refused to play: he was not interested in time-wasting games depending on chance, he explained. He watched for awhile, then he and Luna drifted from one group to another as cards dissolved into conversation: there were interesting ideas waiting for the gathering.

Then Hitler returned abruptly, three days before he was expected. Two things were significant: he consulted Zodius *before* he had any word with Goering and Himmler: and he did not summon the astrologer—he came to his room.

The Führer was in a bad temper: evidently his conferences with his generals had been acrimonious. Yet his glance at Zodius was still nervous, as if he feared the astrologer's authority.

"I am going to see Mussolini very soon," he announced. "You said that you had something to say to me?"

"Yes, I have. I would like you to look at this."

He passed over the old copy of Nostradamus' *Centuries*. Hitler handled it with lively curiosity.

"Why, this is Séve's edition!" he exclaimed. "I have never seen it before."

"You are very familiar with Nostradamus, of course?"

"Naturally."

"You know that some of his quatrains refer pointedly to Mussolini?"

"I know one or two which do. Wait—let me find them. Here is one—*Century V*, No. 29, which is said to refer to my meeting with him at Venice. There is another which emphasises his ordinary name. But neither is very explicit."

"There is another, which is *very* explicit."

Hitler looked up sharply. Then, dramatically Zodius repeated the story which he had told earlier to Himmler. Of Hitler's keen

interest there was no question—he almost grabbed the parchment from Zodius' hand. It was not the one which contained the Himmler-Goering quatrain. Instead, Zodius pointed to another verse, slightly damaged by the fixing of the parchment in the drum.

"Read it to me—I do not know enough French," Hitler ordered.

"This is a rough translation :

' In all corners the battle shall rage,
When in the south the Duce shall be betrayed,
The sun fallen, and after twenty-two years,
From the north shall come succour from his friend.' " *

"God in heaven! But this is indeed a confirmation of the stars!" Hitler exclaimed. "How do you interpret 'the sun fallen'?"

"I should say, after midsummer."

"Yes, I see. And the year?"

"That is the most remarkable feature of the whole prophecy—one of the most astonishing which Nostradamus ever made. It is obvious what he means—"

"I have it! The 22nd year of Fascism!"

"Exactly. That is to say, this year 1943."

Hitler was quiet: ideas were surging within him. Suddenly he turned from the parchment to Zodius.

"My friend, you were right when you said that the stars brought you to me. Loyally I have tried to follow their influences, but I have been misled by incompetents. My enemies say that I dismissed my astrologer after the British fled at Dunkirk, because he would not prophesy a successful campaign against England. They lied: I dismissed him because he was wrong. He misread the message of the stars. Had I followed my own instinct, and made an attack on England, by this time I should have been master of Europe."

Zodius said nothing, but his ideas were different. Even if Hitler had essayed the invasion of England, for the first time he would have fought, not an army, but a nation.

"He was a fool, that man," Hitler went on. "Later I found that the omens were good. But then it was too late."

"Were you not warned of the attack of Russia?"

* The forged verse read, in the antique French and style of Nostradamus :

*"De toutes parts ils iront s'esbatans,
Quand dans le sud le Duc sera trahi,
Le soleil tombé, et après vingt-deux ans,
Du nord viendra secors de son ami."*

"The stars favoured the attack, but my generals bungled. They wasted six precious weeks in Greece and Crete, wiping out half a dozen British and Greek divisions, to win some barren mountains and a barren island. They promised that it would be a stepping stone to Syria and the East. But it lead nowhere."

"It *could* lead nowhere," said Zodius. "I could have shown you that, in the stars."

"Could I have had those six weeks——!" Hitler went on, his fury obvious. "But never fear! I shall have those Russians. I have ordered a retreat, and the swine will think that they are winning. Then I shall attack hard, and they will be devastated. At the right moment I shall offer them peace—on easy terms. They will accept. Then I can turn on Britain again—this time you shall choose the moment. With Britain destroyed, America can do no harm. Then I can turn again on Russia!"

There was a savage tone of revenge in his voice. The fanatic in Hitler was rising: Zodius gently urged him on—in his frenzy Hitler might reveal useful ideas.

"They are devils, these Russians. They have no scruples. But they are so easy to deceive. Look how they made a pact of friendship with me before the war began! A pact of friendship! The hypocrites! They thought to see me exhaust myself in the West. Then they could attack me. The hypocrites, I say!" Zodius suppressed a smile. Evidently the proverb about the pot and the kettle was unknown in Germany. "They profess to be the friends of the common people—workers of the world," Hitler thundered on. "But they make a pact of friendship with their enemy so as to turn the battle against the workers of France and England! Now they learn their lesson. For the moment we yield ground, use it as a weapon, as you said. But their casualties are terrible. They cannot hold on for ever. But for British and American help, they would have fallen long ago. What fools these British and Americans are! Do they not see the Russian plan for world domination? The Bolsheviks openly proclaim that they will seize half of Poland—their ally! What of the other half? 'We cannot talk with the Polish Government in London,' they say. 'It is not representative. So we have a government of Polish Communists, ready to instal in Warsaw! The Polish government is not representative, they say—but they negotiate with the Czech Government of Benés, which has no basis of authority whatsoever. How blind the British and Americans are!'"

He halted to wipe his mouth, where a thin foam of saliva had formed. But, now launched on his favourite theme, he could not be restrained.

"Will the Russians halt at Poland?" he shouted. "They plan to take the Balkans. They plan to take Germany. Then the idiots of Britain and America would tremble. The masses of Russia, plus the might of Germany, and the rest of the world would be powerless. But it shall be the other way round. The might of Germany, plus the masses of Russia—who could stand against us? I am the leader, not the Asiatic Jew who calls himself Stalin. I can fool him again, as I did four years ago. If necessary, I will call myself a Communist, as he does. How wicked those people are! I planned to build peace. On its basis, I would have rebuilt Germany—did you see my plans for the new Berlin? I tell you that I shall carry them out. The campaign of terror-bombing only makes it more urgent. I did not want war with Britain, I tell you—it was the Jews who made it. But these Bolsheviki, they are wicked men. The time will come when the British and Americans will see that I speak the truth. Even now there is no trust between them—how could there be?"

Hitler was now shouting wildly, completely uncontrolled. His frenzy was emphasised by the complete calm of Zodiuss: Luna, once again, had withdrawn into the background. Only with some difficulty could Hitler's coherency be followed.

"The Poles were fools! Five times I offered them a pact, to march against Russia by my side. They refused, and Russia marched against them, and now their own ally once more seizes half of their country, and covets the whole. What do the stars say about a separate peace?"

"I have not consulted them, *mein Führer*."

"We will do it, you and I. If I could divide my enemies for three months, then the power would be mine. It is only a question of selecting the right time. There is such distrust between them that I have only to choose the moment. The Russians clamour for a second front—though they stood on one side when the British fought on alone, like the fools they are. If only I could goad the British and Americans to an invasion before they are prepared! My agents in England are doing well—they stir up public pressure on Churchill—their Communist dupes scrawl messages all over the walls. It is incredible that people should be such fools. In Germany we do not conduct wars by scrawling messages on walls: that

is why we win. These hypocrites !” He reverted abruptly to a former theme. “ I hate cant and hypocrisy above all things. They prate about their Atlantic Charter—they have no ideas of territorial expansion—no changes of territory except by the wishes of the people concerned ! And then they sit back to watch the Bolsheviks take a huge slice of Eastern Europe ! Still, the Russian plan for world dominion by force is a wonderful gift to our propaganda service. Because of it, we have done comparatively well in the occupied countries. There are still some people who do not see the advantages of my New Order, but they can all see the disadvantages of a Russian New Order !

“ Oh, the hypocrisy of these people appals me, I say. The Russians hold a puppet government over Poland—their scheme is plain. Not territorial conquest—merely establishing local communist governments ! It is simple, is it not ? Maybe that is the plan for Germany, too. And their brutality—” again his theme switched. “ Those murders at Katyn ! Terrible ! They try to blame us—as if we would murder captive officers ! They do not explain how it is that no word was ever heard from these eight thousand officers since the spring of 1940, a year and a half before we reached Katyn. Oh, they are fiends, these Bolsheviks ! But the day will come when—tell me, Herr Professor, do any of these quatrains concern me ? ”

“ Yes, *mein Führer*. ”

“ Ah ! ” Hitler’s rage subsided abruptly : in place, his earlier nervousness returned. His hand was almost shaking as he seized the piece of parchment—again to confess his inability to read it.

Zodius took it from him, and began to translate : *

‘ When the captain of the Great Germany dies
Then will be seen many people, mourning, troubled,
Days of terror and hate, the hooked symbol,
And the people cried that he died too young.’

As if he were suddenly sobered, Hitler stared at the parchment. He had often referred emotionally in his speeches to his early death, but its prophecy four hundred years earlier seemed to stagger him.

* The actual quatrain read :

“ *De Germanie mourra le capitaine,
Las qu'on verra grand peuple tourmenté.
Signes crochus, jours de terreur et haine
Sera pleuré si ieune trespasé.* ”

"I do not like it," he muttered. "They mourn me, but there is terror and hate. Am I not to live to see my triumph?"

"*Mein Führer*, it would be easy for me to say that you would live for another twenty years. The charlatan is the man who always promises fair. I speak only the truth as I gather it from the stars. It may be that I err——"

"You do not err. I have known for many years that my life is not to be long. That does not matter. But there is so much to do. I must beat down my enemies. I must establish the Great Germany. I must see my New Order in being. Give me time for that, give me time!"

"You ask for what is not mine to give. I have refused to prophesy fair things to you, but only what the stars reveal to me. Nowhere in your horoscope is there any suggestion of long life. I am sorry, *mein Führer*, I know what added years of your life would mean to the world. But if I cannot speak as I find, then I will not speak at all. And this quatrain—that was written by a man of skill, far greater than I. There are people who will scoff at Nostradamus——"

"I do not want them. I need you."

"Will you heed this, *mein Führer*? When you have seen Mussolini, will you do nothing until you have consulted me?"

"Of course. I purposed to do that."

"And will you do it urgently?"

"Of course, I say. You will remain here until my return. But why is it urgent?"

"Because I, too, *mein Führer*, am doomed to die, very soon!"

CHAPTER TWENTY

HITLER stared at him open-mouthed. Before he could speak, Zodiuss waved him away.

"I am rather weary," he said.

Hitler suffered himself to be dismissed. As soon as he had gone, Luna almost dragged Zodiuss to the greater security of her room.

"Brother, what did you mean?" she whispered. "You must not die!"

"On the contrary, an early demise is obviously indicated," he declared, cheerfully.

"Why?"

"In the first place, an astrologer's life is short here. I am aiming at permanent effects, not temporary successes. The influence of a dead prophet is greater than that of a live one. If I hang on, I am bound to make a lot of mistakes in my guesses, and I should then go the way of my predecessors. But my present purpose is to plant ideas in Hitler's mind. He will remember them after I am dead."

"And in the second place?"

"In the second place, I ought to return to London in order to make my prophecies come true. My arrangements there were very elastic, of course—I could not foresee the course of events here. Now I ought to return, so as to tell the Allied commanders exactly what ideas Hitler has. This should be mighty useful."

"I see. So you are not going to die!"

"Not if I can help it! Only Zodius will die. Lester, I hope, will live!"

"It is a pity. I know only Zodius."

"When happier times come, you will know the man who made him."

"And what about me—am I to die too?"

"I do not know. Do you want to die?"

"No!" Her voice was very firm. "I would like to be with you, wherever you go. But if it is better, I shall stay in Breslau, working for my country."

"You must be doubly careful. If your underground organisation were betrayed, and you were implicated, then Zodius is implicated, too—even after he is dead."

"Yes, I can see that. Have no fear. There are many ways in which I can serve."

"I think that you ought to cut yourself apart from Dr. Kraus—he runs such risks. It is a pity—with his help, I could die a nice painless death. But I dare not have him involved."

"Why not?"

"Because of the risks he runs. The chances are that one day he will be caught out. Then all his friends and patients will be suspect. Already we are involved—he was your doctor. But that can be explained away, if there is no other evidence. Yet even the dead Zodius will have enemies. Yes, I have a lot of thinking to do."

"You are satisfied, so far?"

"More than satisfied. We have Hitler's confidence—for a brief period, at any rate, he will do as we say."

"He is so insipid. I cannot understand how he commands the mob."

"Never in world history was so much power in the hands of a man so unworthy. However, that works to our advantage. I am aiming to put his mind into a state of indecision. This, coupled with the feuds about him, will weaken his purpose."

Again they went out, to wander over the mountains. As an escape from danger, Zodius decided on a return to Breslau until after the Hitler-Mussolini meeting. On their return to their quarters, he did not ask permission—he instructed the adjutant to prepare the journey. A few days of quiet would be a tonic. And there would be an opportunity to consult Allenstein—while Dr. Kraus might visit them by stealth, to suggest convenient methods of dying.

Their rest was interrupted by a peremptory telephone call from Berchtesgaden. On their return they encountered an impatient Hitler.

"You were right, Herr Professor," he said. "There is treachery in Italy. Mussolini is uneasy—and his troops can scarcely be induced to fight. You were right when you said that danger threatened from the south. Now we must counter it."

"Yes. Danger threatens, I said, but does not necessarily strike. What does Mussolini propose to do?"

"He suggests the arrest of all the potential traitors—including the King."

"That would mean civil war in Italy."

"What of that?"

"We must see if it would be to our advantage. Shall we go up to the Eagle's Nest tonight? In the meantime my sister and I will work hard on the appropriate horoscopes."

Hitler would obviously have preferred to continue the conversation, but accepted the decision of Zodius. A special party had been invited to celebrate the Führer's return, and many local guests had been invited. Henny von Schirach pleaded with Zodius and Luna to appear.

"Everybody is talking about you," she said. "All sorts of stories are going round."

Thus is a seer's reputation made. When examined, most of these

stories were sheer fiction : men are so impressionable, so stupid, that they *want* to believe fairy tales. The more regimented they are, the more they move towards escapism. Small wonder that a few determined and unscrupulous men can control a mob.

The party had a somewhat forced gaiety, for Hitler stood on one side, very moody. Goebbels had appeared—probably startled at the reports concerning the Führer's new astrologer. Zodius fought hard to control his loathing. Most of the Nazi leaders were ignorant men : but Goebbels was a doctor of philosophy—he must surely have known that the doctrines he propounded were false. His first impression of Zodius were apparently equally antagonistic.

The time was ripe for a minor success, to create the right atmosphere. Among the party was a young officer on leave : he was an intelligent man, with the broad forehead of the student, a wide jaw and a strong nose : his conversation differed from the chatter of the people around. Gradually, after refreshments had been served, he gathered a little coterie about him. His talk was very unsuited to the occasion : it was a logical, materialistic discourse—the man was without humour or emotion.

"The British are incapable of appreciating the materialistic conception," he was saying. "They prefer fancies to facts. When I lived there—and I was born in London——"

"At the end of August, or early in September," Zodius put in, quietly.

"What?" the officer turned on him. "How did you know that?"

"Probably in the late morning, say between ten o'clock and noon," Zodius added.

The officer's face showed his astonishment. The women crowded round Zodius, demanding to know how he could deduce such details.

"There is much nonsense abroad," he said. "I am no magician, only a student. This happens to be a simple deduction. This young man's physical features are very strongly marked : I deduced from his brow, nose and jaw that he was born under Scorpio—probably with Scorpio rising. Yet he was so completely unemotional and logical in his argument that Mercury must be a considerable influence : the planet must be in either Gemini or Virgo. His essential practicality and lack of humour suggested Virgo. Probably, therefore, the Sun was in Virgo, which meant that he was born between August 23rd and September 23rd. The Sun in

Virgo in England would be approaching the midheaven—that is, the time would be just before noon.”

“Marvellous!”

“On the contrary. I considered only the obvious trends. There was no certainty in my deductions—I would never have banked upon them unconfirmed.”

The guests thought otherwise: the salon buzzed with excited conversation. If a man can be judged by his friends, Zodius mused, then Hitler was of no quality.

Zodius trapped an anxious and imperious glance from the Führer. He nodded casually and made his way to the door. No word was spoken during the strange journey up to the Eagle's Nest. But, the moment the guards were dismissed, Hitler turned to the astrologer eagerly.

“What do the stars suggest?” he cried.

Luna spread out a series of horoscopes. But Hitler was in no mood for study: he was dominated by the personality of Zodius.

“Tragedy for Mussolini is inevitable,” Zodius began. “He is threatened on every side, except from the north. The stars agree with the message of Nostradamus, that the Duce's ‘friend from the north shall succour him.’ Your own horoscope points to southern influences.”

“Shall I march into Italy?” Hitler demanded. “A brusque blow may shatter this treachery and bring the Italians to heel.”

“No, not now. The signs are all against success in the south now—and events in North Africa confirm their suggestions—look, the Sun in opposition to Mars. After midsummer the signs change their aspect. The longer you wait, the better the prospects.”

“But if the British invade Italy——”

“So much the better. If *you* march into Italy tomorrow, you are the aggressor. But if the British and Americans invade, even the Italians may be rallied to defend their own land.”

“Yes! You are right!”

“You should easily be able to hold the attack. It will be over-organised, and slow. You will have time to rush divisions to the south of Italy when the blow comes. You must hold the divisions in readiness.”

“We have not too many to spare.”

“If necessary, you can withdraw troops from Russia. There the signs are more propitious, even if we have to give up ground. If we

can postpone the battle of Italy until the autumn, then the stars are favourable."

The reasoning of Zodius, following his conversation with Allenstein, was sound. The Germans could occupy Italy with a dozen divisions—and at the same time could make the Allies pay a bitter price for a landing. On the other hand, once a British-American army were well ashore, it could involve a far larger German army in defensive battles. Gently and subtly he led up to the necessary suggestions. Hitler followed them eagerly.

Then Zodius broke off suddenly—it would be a great mistake to over-emphasise an idea.

"The stars suggest danger in Germany as well as in Italy, *mein Führer*," he said, brusquely.

"What? You mean the British terror bombing? But our people will hold firm—they must. I do not believe that they will weaken. They know their doom at the hands of the Jews and Bolsheviks if they fail."

"I was not thinking of the terror bombing."

"Ah!"

"During the coming months there are very strange combinations," Zodius went on. "I note especially the planets in Leo, the traditional ruling sign of France. They spell danger in Germany."

"But France is powerless—we control everything in the country."

"I said in *Germany*, *mein Führer*. There is no danger from France—but there are two million Frenchmen inside Germany!"

"God in heaven! You are right! I have always said that it was wrong to bring these foreigners into the Reich!"

There was real fury in his tone. Zodius knew quite well that the question had occasioned a bitter argument in Nazi circles. Should foreign workers be brought into Germany, or should the machinery be taken to them in their own countries? If it were, then it might have to be left there in the event of defeat. And surely it would be possible to effect a more rigorous control inside the Reich! Such were the arguments. In practice, the foreign workers had proved most difficult to control. They worked for food; they made no attempt to conceal their contempt for their conquerors: they were confident in an Allied victory—and confidence is infectious. The Germans, with their inferiority complex, hate being hated, and every glance from the majority of foreign workers was of reproach with a suggestion of revenge.

"I read that there is danger from these people. It is not earthy:

it does not suggest sabotage. It comes from an intellectual sign—it is danger to the mind, the morale of our people." Zodiuss was then silent, leaving the implications to be assimilated.

Hitler had been pacing up and down in his agitation. Now he halted suddenly—but his right foot continued to tap the floor.

"Am I surrounded by fools?" he cried. "Maybe the time is coming for another Night of the Long Knives."

This was excellent, Zodiuss thought. Nothing would be more likely to lower German morale than another wholesale purge of Nazi leaders.

"Yet what am I to do?" Hitler asked, his arms raised pathetically. "Am I to send them back, or impose a stricter control?"

The answer was easy. Either method would aid the Allied cause—the more restrictive the controls on the foreign workers, the less work they would do. On the other hand, an attempt to move back to their own countries the millions of foreign workers—and their machinery and supplies—could only lead to appalling confusion in German war industries.

"The danger is *within* Germany," Zodiuss said gravely. "If these foreigners remain, the danger remains."

"The fools! The incompetents!" Tears were now rolling down Hitler's cheeks: tears of fury and self-pity. "There is so much to do. Must I do it all myself?"

"You have succeeded, because you have followed the guidance of the stars. Others were not so wise."

"But my greater Germany shall live—I know that this is written in the stars! It cannot fall. The Jewish curse cannot descend upon the world. Rather than that, I would die a thousand times. Can you picture the fate of the German people, should the Jew Stalin prevail? But my Germans know this—that is why they will fight to the end. They are tired, but they will fight. The Frenchman Foch was right when he said that wars are won by exhausted armies. I have no fears."

His voice betrayed him: he had. Zodiuss was highly pleased. Already, within a fortnight of his first meeting with Hitler, the germ of defeatism had been sown, and suspicion was firmly planted.

"Tell me, Herr Professor," Hitler broke off suddenly, "I have a feeling that you have more to say about Nostradamus. I have always set great store on that man."

"As ever, your instinct is right, *mein Führer*. I have something else to show you. Let us first refer to the prophecies in the pub-

lished *Centuries*. Here, in the Fifth Volume, number 94, is a couplet which bears on your recent remarks :

‘ *Translata en le Grand Germanie,
Brabant et Flandres, Gand, Bruges, et Bolongne.*’

This is, you will include in the Greater Reich, Belgium and the north-east of France.”

“ That is true—I plan to do that.”

“ Then there are the ‘ Hister ’ quatrains——”

“ I do not believe that they concern me ! ” Hitler said, with great decision. “ They represent me as a man of violence, who recognises no law of God or man. What folly to identify me with such a man ! ”

This was rather disconcerting, as Zodius had prepared a line of attack based upon the “ Hister ” quatrains. He accepted the situation, however—he had never known Hitler’s voice so definite in its tone.

“ There is one quatrain which confirms the one I discovered on the parchment,” he went on. “ It concerns Italy :—

‘ When the soldiers murmur against their chief,
When in the darkness their weapons shine,
Then Albion’s enemy furiously shall strive,

And seduced from allegiance the citizens of Rome.’ ”

“ Yes. I have studied that. Your new verse is much more explicit. But you had more to show me, you said ? ”

Zodius passed over the parchment, and translated the verse which so obviously referred to a struggle for power between Goering and Himmler. Hitler was strangely affected : indeed, he seemed to find this passage more impressive than any of the others. Nor did it tend to calm him : instead, his fury increased. He was almost beside himself as Luna walked towards him.

“ Calm, *mein Führer*, calm ! ” She laid her hand on his forehead, and he looked at her with startled, nervous eyes. Gently she led him to a chair, and sat him down. Now she knelt beside him, gently running her fingers over his eyelids. Gradually her administration seemed to have some effect. For several consecutive minutes Hitler sat quiet.

Then a new sound disturbed the silence—a gasp from Zodius.

“ Sister ! ”

She rushed to his side : Hitler followed, anxiously. Zodius crouched in a chair, his arms clasped about his chest, a deep flush

across his cheeks. He appeared to be breathing with great difficulty.

"He must not die!" cried Hitler. "Call the guards—he must not die!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THERE was no danger of his dying—Zodius had only taken half a tablet, aiming at rapid and startling results rather than lasting effects. By the time they got him down to the Haus Wachenfels, and Hitler's own physician had been summoned, Zodius had almost recovered, though his heart still retained traces of its over-strenuous beating. The physician prescribed a draught and complete rest.

Zodius was delighted at Hitler's reactions. Now the Führer had an added worry—his astrologer's forecast of death seemed to be confirmed.

Hitler was round at the suite of rooms early next morning. His eyes avoided Luna as he inquired after Zodius—he seemed to be afraid of her—but he was very relieved when the astrologer appeared, apparently recovered.

The Führer obviously had something on his mind. He was not very impressive in his nervous anxiety.

"I have been talking to General Headquarters," he announced. "They are obstinate. They say that they can deal with events in Italy. And they say, moreover, that they can hold on for months in North Africa."

"Months, or days? I cannot argue on military considerations, *mein Führer*—I do not count men and guns, I read the stars."

"They are difficult to read," Hitler muttered.

"But they never fail when men read them correctly. I have an idea—let us go into Munich, to the planetarium."

An adjutant telephoned an order ahead, and the building was closed to the public for the day. The planetarium is one of the best gifts of German science to the world—it is indeed a reproach that Britain, almost alone in the civilised countries, does not possess one. It consists of a large room with one circular wall from which rises a domed roof. Both wall and roof are limewashed in a pale tint, and on them is thrown, from a complicated arrangement of projectors, a

complete picture of the sky. The lenses can be so adjusted as to show the position of the "fixed" stars—which of course changes slightly hour by hour and day by day—at any assigned time and date of the year. Other lenses show—accurately—the wandering movements of the planets, while an arrow of light can draw the attention of the audience to any star or planet of special importance. Around the base of the wall is printed a silhouette of the roofs in the town, the churches and other tall buildings enabling spectators to "place" the stars in relation to the earthly landscape.

Lester, as he watched the spectacle, felt that it would be a good idea to impose upon Germany, as part of the peace-terms, the task of making one of these for every city in the British Isles.

A strange audience of three sat under the vast dome of concrete. A technical assistant operated the complicated apparatus in the centre of the floor.

"Give us tonight's starscape," Zodus ordered.

There was some delay as the delicate machinery was adjusted. Then the stars began to rise on the artificial sky above. Leaning back in their chairs, Hitler, Zodus and Luna examined the constellations.

"The moon nearing the first quarter, in close conjunction with Mercury and square to Jupiter in the eighth," said Zodus softly, so that the operator might not hear. "You can follow? It is not so easy to understand as a horoscope, and of course not so accurate, but it conveys a more realistic effect to the mind."

"I follow."

"Mars in the third, square Venus—that indicates transport difficulties. Move on to the full moon, slowly!" he called out aloud.

The stars moved in their courses over the ceiling of the vast dome. Even to the uninitiated, the planetarium is a delight—a thousand years of world time can pass in an hour. Now, however, the mechanism was moving very slowly.

"Halt!" Zodus called. "Full moon—11.11 a.m. on April 20th, 1943—in trine to Mars. And your generals find comfort in that! I see death and crisis approaching. Mercury culminates in sextile to Jupiter—as I said before, this confirms happier conditions in the East. On to the New Moon!"

"Look," he continued. "May 4th, 9.43 a.m., with Saturn and Mercury in conjunction, and Uranus sextile to Mars. All the signs point to the south—and to a British success—Mars has a traditional

influence on that country. I am anxious, *mein Führer*. How easy it would be to prophesy unbroken success, but I never saw signs which pointed so fixedly to difficulty in the south. Venus, your own star, is below the horizon, in weak opposition to Mars. I will swear by all the powers I possess—but wait! On to the Full Moon!”

Again the starscape changed.

“I can breathe,” Luna whispered.

“Yes. Venus rises. Her path is clear.”

“You mean—the danger is over?” Hitler asked anxiously.

“No. I mean nothing. The stars mean this: that we pass through a very dangerous period in the south between May 4th and May 18th.”

“In Italy?”

“It may be—or in North Africa. The simplicity of the sky after the New Moon is curious—it may mean a clearance of conflict because of its elimination in North Africa.”

“My generals are confident that they can hold.”

“They may be right. I say only that the stars suggest danger. Move on to the New Moon—slowly!”

Again Zodius, in his low, dramatic tone, expounded the situation as the course of the stars changed.

“Now we approach Midsummer,” he said at length. “Note the position of Mars and Saturn to the Full Moon. There is Regulus—in Leo—I spoke of his influence. Stop! That is far enough. We must think over what we have seen.”

Hitler was moody on the journey back to Berchtesgaden. Zodius was right in his premise: he would have been highly appreciated had he prophesied unbroken success. But his life as Hitler's astrologer would then be short. Before he left England he had learned something of the overwhelming preparations being made for the final German defeat in North Africa. It was much safer to predict the probable, and to depend on his powerful personality to maintain his hold on his victim.

Hitler seemed agitated and troubled, to the great joy of Zodius. The decisions of an agitated dictator can have wide repercussions.

Zodius and Luna entered their suite. They had by this time slipped automatically into the routine that their only conversation in the living-room should be strictly in keeping with their public characters. But now Luna pulled her brother into her room.

“They have been here, searching!” she whispered, very softly.

"I am not surprised. This place is full of intrigue."

"I do not trust Goering. If he ever knew what we told to Himmler——"

"And I don't trust Goebbels. Or, for that matter, Himmler. Still, we ought to be safe—Hitler is our friend."

A spy and a fortune-teller need one common quality—they must be sensitive to atmosphere. The party at Haus Wachenfels that night was small and private. Most of the guests fawned on the two astrologers, either as a result of their public exploits or because of Hitler's obvious favour. In spite of that, both Zodius and Luna were somewhat uneasy.

Himmler was not at the dinner table, but came in later. He had been away for a day or two, and was now due to return to Berlin.

Conversation proceeded briskly enough as the party divided into little groups. For a few moments Zodius found himself isolated with Himmler. The man was obviously anxious: what is more, he could scarcely face the astrologer's eyes. Zodius sensed that something was wrong and risked a guess. He calculated that the intruder in his suite must have been some agent of Goering—there was no apparent reason why Himmler should take such a step. But why had Goering become suspicious?

"I thought that no one was to know of our conversation, Herr Himmler?" Zodius said, quietly.

Himmler stared at the seer as with a new respect.

"Others know," he whispered, with a suggestion of shame as well as of anger in his voice. "Something has gone wrong."

"How?"

"When I left you, I made a note of the quatrain, from memory——"

"I see. And some one has stolen it?"

Himmler nodded. Before Zodius could make a further comment, two women joined them. There were demands for more exhibitions of the wonders of astrology, but these were firmly refused.

"I am uneasy, brother," Luna confessed later.

"I don't like this new turn of events," he agreed. "We wanted to set the Nazi leaders one against the other, and we've succeeded. But we didn't want to set one side against us! With every hour that passes, I come more firmly to the conclusion that the sooner I am dead the better. After all, we have done the main part of our job. We have planted ideas in Hitler's mind: he is already at loggerheads with his generals about the campaign in Russia: he

will do as we suggested in Italy. Himmler and Goering have their own factions and will fight. We have planted doubts about German morale and the influence of the foreign workers—we have introduced to Hitler the first suggestion of defeatism. That is a gnawing growth! If I could only talk to him on my death-bed! Tell me," he broke off suddenly, "how many people know that Dr. Kraus is engaged in the underground campaign?"

"Not more than five, including me—and Wernski."

"If the other three are like you, then there would be no risk."

"I thought that you argued——"

"Yes, I argued that I dare not involve Kraus. But I see no option. Yet the risks——"

"Would it help if Kraus were to retire from our organisation?"

"Yes, it would—emphatically!"

"That could be arranged. No man is vital. So far Kraus is quite free from any suspicion. He is technically a German—he is not even a Socialist. He serves on German medical boards. He——"

"I must use him. I need a doctor for my scheme. Kraus is the only possible man."

"Very well. This plan is so much more important than the ordinary details of underground warfare. We will gladly spare Dr. Kraus to you."

"We must return to Breslau as soon as we can."

"Will Hitler allow it?"

"If the stars say so. It is time that he returned to battle headquarters, anyway."

Zodius allowed another two days to elapse. Then, from a casual conversation with an orderly, he gathered that Hitler was about to leave Berchtesgaden.

"*Mein Führer*, the time has come for us to part for awhile," he announced, suddenly.

"I was going to tell you—I am going to General Headquarters," Hitler said.

"And I must return to Breslau. I am at your command always, of course. I will come to you. Or you will come to me."

"My friend, you must take care. You are not well." There was real warmth in Hitler's voice.

"I know. But how can a man fight his destiny? You knew long ago that you were fated to have a disease of the throat. With the ruling planet in Taurus, afflicted by Mars and Saturn—an astrologer would have told you long before a doctor to look to the

neck and throat. But for me—"Zodius halted for a moment, as if emotionally moved—"the Sun was in evil aspect. You know what that means—the heart."

"Let me send physicians from Berlin——"

"Useless, *mein Führer*. I have complete faith in my own physician—and my stars. Yet I shall serve you while I live, and after I am dead."

"It is a long and tiring journey to Breslau," Hitler said anxiously. "I will arrange an aeroplane to take you. And to bring you back on my return."

"You are kind, *mein Führer*. And you will remember that you have the guidance of the stars: generals are guided by military theory and text-books."

Next morning they motored to the small airport, specially built for Hitler: an expensive luxury, in this mountain country. The aircraft was comfortable, but the weather was not over-fine: mountains seldom make good flying country, and above the Bohemian hills the plane bumped nastily. Luna, unaccustomed to air travel, was sick, to her great disgust.

They approached Breslau in good time, and the pilot put down the nose of the plane. But as the landing wheels made the first brief contact with the ground, the machine twirled round awkwardly.

The steward rushed to the side window, an anxious look on his face.

"The starboard tyre has gone!" he shouted.

Zodius was scarcely alarmed. It is not easy, but not difficult, to land a machine on a flat tyre. But something happened. Bumping along the ground, the aircraft slewed violently. Then a sudden and frightening jolt, as the hull of the plane dragged along the terrace. Zodius, who had been standing by the window, was flung to the floor, and lay there dazed. There were shouts forward: then a final shuddering crash.

Within a few seconds, so it seemed, the machine burst into flames. The steward had already forced open the door, and called to Luna. She, too, had been flung forward by the crash, and scarcely heard his call. The steward advanced and dragged her towards the door: she was almost unconscious as he lifted her to the ground.

Now the pilot and navigator were scrambling from the aircraft. From the other side of the airfield men were running: an ambulance and a fire engine were speeding over the intervening turf.

By sheer will-power Luna conquered her faintness : sitting on the ground, she surveyed the burning plane.

"My brother !" she shuddered. "Zodius ! He is in there !"

The steward rushed back to the door—in his anxiety over Luna, he had forgotten Zodius : or maybe he thought that the man could make his own escape. With great courage he entered the fuselage. Zodius lay where he had fallen, apparently unconscious.

The steward tried to drag him clear, for the flames were intense and uncomfortably near. Fortunately, at this moment the fire engine arrived, and men in asbestos clothing relieved the steward, carrying Zodius to safety : not a moment too soon. A few seconds later the fuselage was a blazing furnace.

The ambulance carried both passengers off to hospital. Luna soon recovered—her injuries were only superficial. Anxiously she asked to be taken to the bedside of Zodius.

He lay in a private room, paler than ever, but quite conscious. Doctor and nurse were both re-assuring.

"Brother," Luna whispered, when they were alone. "I didn't know that you were going to play the first act of your death drama today."

"I didn't," he replied.

"What ? You mean that it was an accident ?"

"No, it wasn't !"

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"I DON'T understand," said Luna. "At first I thought you had arranged the crash somehow, as a first step towards your death."

"I shall use it as that—but I didn't arrange it."

"But you said that it wasn't an accident ?"

"No. I was lying on the floor when the steward dragged you out. I was winded, but conscious. Then the pilot came scrambling along. One would have thought that he would have halted to give a hand to his passenger. Instead——"

"He left you there to die !"

"More than that. He gave me a very hard kick on the head, to make certain that I was unconscious."

"Ah ! I begin to see."

"Yes. That pilot must be having some awkward moments just now—wondering whether I was conscious enough to know that he kicked me. Of course, he can always claim that he stumbled over me. But I'm open to bet that he's along here pretty soon, to find out exactly how much I know or suspect."

"And you won't tell him?"

"On the contrary. I shall congratulate him on his skilful handling of a desperate situation, which might have cost us all our lives. Then, having escaped from me, he will have to look forward to another awkward interview with his boss, Goering. These people are not very gentle with minions who fail."

"But are you really hurt, brother?"

"I've got a sore head and some bruises, but I could walk out of hospital tonight. I'm not going to do so. I am very ill. My sister will stay by my side. My own doctor will naturally rush to hospital—I have specially asked for him. I shall have one or two very nasty heart attacks, witnessed by the staff of the hospital. Thus, when eventually I die, no one will be much surprised. I do not propose to die here—that would be very awkward, for they might bury me by hospital arrangements instead of by my own. At a suitable moment, the invalid will plead to be taken to his sister's home."

Her eyes glistened as she appreciated his plan. Had she known Zodius better as Lester, she would have realised that this was a scene after his own heart—to cash in on the mistake of an adversary. Goering wanted him to die, and had helped in the process: an excellent basis on which to plan.

Sure enough, the pilot came along to ask after his passenger: Dr. Kraus followed. The hospital surgeon naturally accompanied him, but Luna slipped out as he left and was able to convey the gist of Zodius' plan to him. He agreed at once to sever his practical connection with the Polish underground organisation. It would be simple: there was no suggestion of suspicion at the moment: he would instruct his few associates to forget all about him—they would never suspect him of treachery: the situation was by no means unprecedented.

There was no time to discuss Zodius' plan to die: Luna quickly told the doctor of the general idea—of the pretence of serious illness, and eventually the desire to be taken home. The rapid outline was quite sufficient: the doctor undertook to think over the essential details.

Zodius agreed that it would have been impossible to carry out his plan without Kraus' help. It is very difficult for a layman to deceive a doctor—unless he has another doctor to help him!

The hospital staff were very concerned. X-ray examination failed to reveal any internal injuries, but their patient gradually lost strength. Of course, his previous history explained a lot—Dr. Kraus had described the weak state of his heart. Kraus called every day. He never saw Zodius except in the presence of the house surgeon: but he was able to hand to Luna such drugs as were necessary to induce the continuity of illness.

Nevertheless, Kraus was anxious. He knew that there could be no half-measures: yet prolonged use of such powerful drugs might do a great deal of harm, even to a man of Zodius' powerful physique. Maybe he did not give sufficient credit to the pseudo-astrologer's prowess as an actor. It was quite certain that no one in the hospital had the slightest suspicion of fake.

At an appropriate moment Zodius, in weary tones, asked to be sent home. The doctors agreed: they had already come to the conclusion that his illness was psychological as well as physiological. There was nothing further which the hospital could do: with good nursing and constant medical attention, he would be just as well at home: and, maybe happier, they agreed.

In this they were right. Zodius spent his first hours walking round the bedroom exercising the legs weakened by long disuse while lying in bed. Luna was going to nurse him: she had declined professional assistance, but had promised to call on the hospital for help in emergency.

"But I haven't got the whole of the plan," said Dr. Kraus. "It would be easy for me to say that you were dead, but you are a celebrity—suppose that some of your friends want to see your body?"

"They will!"

"Then——"

"I shall lie in state, for a limited season."

"What? Go on, Herr Professor; you are out of my depth."

"Do you know anything about Yoga, doctor?"

"Ah! I read about it in my student days, of course. 'Diversion of the senses from the eternal world, and concentration of thought within.'"

"Yes, the control of nature itself. There's no illusion about it, you know. I have seen *fakirs* in India in a state of suspended

animation for days. I have seen men buried under a pile of sand for hours. I assure you that there's no fake."

"Oh, I have heard of that kind of thing," the doctor agreed. "But that isn't quite the point. Yoga, as I remember it, demands long practice and a certain state of mind. It cannot be practised by an amateur."

"I'm only a novice, but not quite ignorant of their methods," Zodiuss explained. "Before I took up Intelligence work, I was a political officer in India. There were long periods of boredom, and I was in any case very interested in local ideas and religions. I got on very friendly terms with an old *fakir* in Peshawar—he got into a spot of bother, and I let him down lightly. I had already learned something about Yoga, and old Rashmi considered me a promising *chela*. I got really interested. Every spare minute for months I spent in study with him. Soon I was quite expert in the elementary exercises——"

"Brother, you are out of *my* depth now," Luna complained. "I know practically nothing of Yoga. Begin at the beginning, please, simply, so that I can understand what you plan to do."

"Yoga is an occult teaching," Zodiuss replied, "current among the Hindu mystics; it purports to contain much knowledge—theoretical and practical too—which has been handed down generation by generation from great mystics of old. It chiefly deals with the nature of the soul—mind, if you like the word better—and its operations on the body."

Kraus looked very doubtful.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking," Zodiuss continued. "You fancy it's a lot of mystical blah because it isn't concrete like our modern science. And I daresay much of it is, too. Is there nothing in orthodox medicine about which you have your doubts?"

Kraus smiled but said nothing.

"The difference is," explained Zodiuss, "that for the last few hundred years we clever Westerners have been concentrating on the control of *things*—and we have certainly achieved some very startling results. Well, for the last few thousand years, at least, the Eastern mystics—who, by the way, despise us as children amusing ourselves with mechanical toys—have been concentrating on the control of themselves. And the results they have produced have been remarkable, too."

"Then why don't they publish them?" the doctor wanted to know.

"There speaks the Western man of science," Zodiuss grinned. "As the Duke of Wellington put it, 'publish and be damned.' And so some triumph of research, the self-less work of some idealistic lover of wisdom, expresses itself in the super-tank or the bombing plane. And who so surprised as the self-less scientist when the bomb crashes on his head?"

"But you must publish or your knowledge is lost!"

"There is another way of saving it—to impart it only to members of some mystical body, sworn to secrecy, who can be trusted only to use it for good ends—and that, nine times out of ten, means not using it at all. That is why the Yogis will not give their knowledge to the world, because a Hitler might use it to enslave the earth."

"But that's sheer obscurantism," protested the doctor, looking horrified. "It's an offence against every canon of scientific ethics."

"Now it may be—and that's why we three are here to try to clear up the mess. But by their standards it's the great offence to broadcast knowledge for every unthinking fool to use. However, that's beside the point. They claim to have incredible powers over their own bodies—they can vary their pulse-beat, temperature and so forth, regulate the secretions of their ductless glands, and I don't know what else. One trick they do—I must apologise to Luna for mentioning it, as it is rather disgusting—is to extract several feet of their own bowels, clean them and replace them without injury."

Luna did, in fact, look disgusted and the doctor incredulous.

"They claim, moreover, to have amazing power of insight and clairvoyance. They can communicate by telepathy and can foretell, within limits, the future. They can memorise *mantras*."

"What?"

"Incantations—or you might regard them as psychological formulae. They claim that to repeat such *mantras* has definite effects on the mind."

"But that's nonsense!"

"Is it? And is it nonsense to say that contemplation of magical symbols influences the mind, too?"

"Of course it is!" the doctor declared.

"Oh—and all around us the most remarkable results are being obtained every day by the repetition of a *mantra* and the contemplation of one of the oldest magical emblems in the world, but reversed so as to turn its good magic into bad."

"Oh, and what is that?" Kraus asked incautiously.

Zodiuss grinned. "The *mantra* consists of the magic words 'Heil

Hitler! and the magic sign, reversed, is the ancient Buddhist symbol, which is, by the way, also known as the Hammer of Thor."

"The swastika?"

"Yes. Well, getting to business. By such methods the Yogis are able to suspend all the vital processes of the body, including respiration and the pulse. It is not a mere claim, it is on record that men subjected to this treatment have actually been buried—and have later been exhumed quite unharmed."

"But you can't do that, surely?"

"Just a minute. That old *guru* to whom I did a kindness confided the method to me—but as I had to take a most solemn oath I would never divulge the method to anyone else you will pardon me, doctor, for not explaining the details to you."

Kraus nodded.

"It consists of a specified dietary, certain drugs—I will give you a list—and some verbal formulae—*mantras*—which I have to repeat for a considerable time. I have also to try to free my mind from all desires and illusions—and that may be more easily said than done."

Kraus looked more dubious than ever. "It sounds more like magic to me than anything else."

"And suppose it is magic?" Zodius agreed cheerfully. "What could be more appropriate for a professional astrologer like myself? So you see, it's the sort of science which grips you," Zodius went on, while both Kraus and Luna were obviously uneasy. "Anyway, I'm going to attempt to die—just for an hour or so. I have already begun my physical preparation—I have fasted for days. Now that I am free from supervision, I can move on to the final preparations."

Dr. Kraus was profoundly disquieted. Although it is perfectly true that the actuality of suspended animation has been medically established, few European physicians are acquainted with the phenomenon. Zodius tried to re-assure him: the doctor had time to learn—the teachings of the old *fakir* could be passed on.

Not that Zodius regarded the prospect of his experiment with any pleasure. Nevertheless, he could see no alternative. A flamboyant fake could no doubt be staged, but the risk of detection was great—and the slightest breath of suspicion would ruin the mission so magnificently accomplished. After all, Zodius had risked death a hundred times during the past months: one additional risk appeared an insignificant trifle. If his plan succeeded, it would be a double success—the death of Zodius would mean the triumph of his mission and the life of Captain Lester.

In every life of adventure come moments of intense yearning. How Lester longed for that view of Kensington Gardens—even longed for the inanities of Podger Cholmondeley.

Nevertheless, as the days passed, Zodius grew just as anxious as Kraus. He found it impossible to create the conditions which had prevailed in his Indian experiments. They demanded a complete detachment from mundane surroundings: but how could he forget his mission, his danger, or Hitler—or Luna?

"I shall try a preliminary experiment soon," he said to Luna, rather despondently. "I doubt if it will be successful, but I had better have my death-bed interview with Hitler first—in case I am too successful. Will you telephone him at General Headquarters—better go up to Hoffmann's to do it."

Luna got her despairing message through: General Hoffmann and his wife returned with her to the flat. They were obviously shocked at the change in Zodius, and needed no convincing that he was a dying man.

"I have a heart specialist on my medical staff," Hoffmann said, as he prepared to leave. "I shall send him round tomorrow. But I doubt if he can do anything."

The heart specialist agreed, as he conferred with Dr. Kraus. He could not know of the skilled preparations which had preceded his visit.

"Any of these attacks may carry him off," the army doctor said. "There is nothing to be done. Yet there is something strange in his illness."

"I agree," Kraus nodded. "There is something psychological. You know that this man is a famous astrologer? He has convinced himself that the stars themselves proclaim his death, and his own will is not prepared to defy them."

"I know the type. I have known men who have willed themselves to death. We are helpless in such cases."

Dr. Kraus was highly satisfied. A perfect background for an alibi for death was being laid. The death certificate he signed would never be queried. He returned to Zodius' bedroom, to make another attempt to dissuade him from the Yoga experiment.

"No, I shall try it," Zodius insisted. "But I have many doubts. In a hut in the mountain valley I might have done it, but I feel that the conditions here are unsympathetic to Yoga. Shall I get up and exercise my legs? Or ought I to stay in bed to prepare for Hitler?"

"Use your legs—you may need them! I can easily prepare you for Hitler!"

They had not long to wait. Within forty-eight hours the Nazi Führer of Germany arrived. His face was tragic as he surveyed the blanched skin, sunken eyes, and limp frame of his astrologer.

"My friend!" he muttered, hoarsely.

"It is written in the stars—I knew it—I told you," Zodiuss whispered, in a hollow tone, apparently with a great effort. "It does not matter."

"It does! I need you!"

"Strange dreams have come to me. Last night my sister threw back the curtain, and I saw the stars. Never did they speak to me so clearly. Your planet is high. Do not forget, *mein Führer*, what I said about your generals."

"I shall not forget."

"Yet I have not been happy. I tried to read the Greater Germany in the skies, but it would not form. But I saw peace in the Reich and you gave it. There will be many difficult days, but then you will offer peace to the world. Others will refuse, but you will offer again. Then peace will come to Germany, a long peace. The stars favour you—their courses speak of peace."

His eyes closed, as if in sign of his weakness. Hitler could scarcely control his agitation.

Zodiuss began to mumble: Hitler leaned down to catch his words, but the seer was incoherent.

"The end is very near," Dr. Kraus whispered.

"That aeroplane accident hastened his death," Luna said, vehemently. "I suppose that it was an accident?"

"What?" Hitler was visibly startled.

"I know nothing. But it was a very strange accident."

"It was destiny!" The hoarse, cracked voice of Zodiuss broke in. "No matter! It may be that someone did wish to remove me from your side—someone who wishes you to lead Germany by his ideas, not by the guidance of the stars. Yet, whoever he was, he did only what the stars had decided for me. But you, *mein Führer*, will remember that the stars point out to you paths of peace. I see new cities rising in Germany—noble buildings, fine streets: I see happy people, and no war. Even if victory does not come, peace will come to Germany. You will be blessed because you brought back peace to the land, and the people will mourn you, as Nostradamus said. I shall be watching, until you follow me. I cannot

calculate, I am too tired, but I think that you have about twenty moons of life. Use them, for death is long."

Again his eyes closed. Now Hitler made no attempt to control his emotion: tears streamed down his cheeks. Dr. Kraus led him gently from the room.

"Magnificent, brother!" Luna whispered, as the "dying man" gave suspiciously like a wink.

Certainly Hitler was unlikely to forget the astrologer's death-bed message. He could not realise it, but it contained every germ of defeatism. The suggestion that, when hard-pressed, Hitler should offer peace was a master-stroke of psychological warfare. Hitler could make such a move while he was obviously winning, and add to his stature by his apparent magnanimity. But if he offered peace when things went against him, it would be a confession of defeat, and would seriously affect German morale. With the ideas of division and dissension already planted, Zodius was more than satisfied with this side of his mission.

When Dr. Kraus called next day, Zodius announced his decision.

"Today I'm going to make a final shot at a temporary death. You know what to do if I succeed. Act quickly, for I shall not be dead long—I hope. Now let me get myself into the right mood." But when Zodius began to apply the Yoga discipline, he found himself against several unexpected snags.

"First of all," he explained. "Those drugs that I'm supposed to use have to be *natural* products. The supplies you have got me are mostly of mineral origin—coal tar derivatives, in short. Even those of vegetable origin have been subjected to all sorts of mechanical processes—grinding, compressing into tablets, and I don't know what else."

"But that has not affected them!"

"No, doctor—for recognised medical purposes maybe not, but these are comparatively crude. But for the work we have in mind, which affects not merely the bodily organs but the border-line between body and soul, I suspect that some indefinable property—you might almost say virtue—has been driven out of them by their contact with metal washing pots."

"Cold Iron," Luna put in, "is traditionally a means of overcoming certain forms of magic."

"Exactly," answered Zodius. "There is much real wisdom hidden in folk-lore, and nursery tales."

"I don't know that I can entirely dismiss the idea," the doctor

conceded thoughtfully. "I am reminded of the fact—which the Japanese army once learned to its cost—that a diet of polished rice led to crippling diseases. Apparently some unsuspected material in the husks of the rice was removed by the polishing. We know it today as Vitamin B!"

"It isn't only the drugs," Zodiuss continued. "The chief trouble is that I cannot empty my mind of all illusion and desire. I have a passionate desire at the moment to outwit Hitler and to return to London to take up further duty in the present war. And I am anxious about Luna—I cannot dismiss *her* from my mind."

"I still find it difficult," protested Kraus, "to believe that, even if conditions had been correct, you could have become temporarily dead."

"Haven't you heard of animals which have 'shammed dead' so effectively as to deceive not merely human hunters but other beasts?"

"Yes, of course."

"Besides, haven't you noticed that the mind can have an effect on the body? Haven't people, under the influence of strong emotion, performed feats of endurance or strength which in the ordinary way would have been quite beyond them? We met many instances of it in the Battle of Britain!"

"Yes, that's true enough. People have thrown off illnesses because they were confronted with a sudden need. I have met that in my own medical practice. We explain it by saying that the ductless glands pour substances into the blood-stream which alter the bodily temperature, the pulse, the rate of breathing. But such effects are only temporary and cannot be produced at will."

"The result of Yogi training," said Zodiuss with strong emphasis, "is to produce similar effects—at will."

"And can you do anything like that?"

"I can suspend breathing for a longer time than would normally be possible. I can, for a short period, make the beating of my heart and pulse almost imperceptible: and—also for a short time—I can hold my body rigidly still. What is more important, perhaps, I can suspend the flow of blood to the skin—of my cheeks and forehead, for example—and so make them seem deathly white and deathly cold."

Kraus seemed astounded. "Then we can arrange everything—but where did you learn all that?"

"I was taught it by old Rashmi, my *guru*. He seemed to think it might be useful to me—perhaps he used his occult powers to

foresee the very position we are now in. Well, at least our ground-work is excellent. Everybody is expecting me to die. If they see my body in a coffin, they will presume that I am dead. A casual visitor does not apply medical tests."

"Shall we revert to the method I suggested?" Dr. Kraus asked.

"Yes, with modifications. If we only had to deceive a few hysterical women, it would be easy. But we ought to have one substantial witness at least—it had better be General Hoffmann. Luna, we shall depend upon you for an emotional diversion at the right moment. Very well, doctor, we will get going. Tell Wernski to be ready at short notice. Luna, in your grief you will retire from astrology and go to live with your sister."

"The one in Danzig?"

"Yes. Later—many months later—we will get you out of there. Or maybe the Russians will advance as far. Anyway, you are to fade out. I don't think that Hitler will ask for you."

"He will not. He is afraid of me—not as an astrologer, but as a woman."

"Dr. Kraus, we shall need a body to be buried in the place of mine. You can provide that, I expect?"

"Yes. But you will be cremated—it is more final. I shall accompany the coffin to the crematorium, as a last token of respect—and to make certain that no idiot tampers with it."

"Excellent! Luna, have scissors and hair-dye handy. Doctor, I want this brightness taken from my eyes—and a normal complexion as rapidly as possible. Everything prepared? Good. Well, I need a good night's sleep. I propose then to eat a hearty breakfast, in the conventional fashion of the condemned man, and am then ready to die at the most convenient hour tomorrow morning!"

The evening papers in Breslau the next day carried paragraphs announcing the death of Zodius, the famous astrologer. News agency reports flashed them to Berlin, for many rumours about Hitler's latest seer had been in circulation.

Twenty-four hours later General Hoffmann and his wife appeared to pay their last respects. The scene proved easier to play than Zodius had anticipated. As he claimed, people surveying a body in a coffin expect it to be dead.

Well warned, Zodius took a deep breath. There was not a trace of colour in his skin and his brow was cold—evidently the teachings of Yoga were sound, and the administrations of Dr. Kraus may have

helped. The two visitors had scarcely given a formal glance when Luna burst into a fit of hysterical sobbing. This was quite sufficient to plunge Frau Hoffmann into a flood of emotional tears. The two men had to turn to comfort the women—and it was quite easy for Dr. Kraus to manœuvre the party out of the room.

At this critical and final stage, Zodiuss was frankly nervous. The strain of the past months was telling its tale; he did not trust his self-control. Dr. Kraus appreciating, hurried on with the concluding preparations, and prepared a very helpful drug.

He reported that evening: everything was arranged. A body would be delivered to the flat by night, and would be cremated the following day. Wernski's plan for the return of Lester to England was complete—the passport of a Swedish business man had been "found," and suitably amended. With any luck, Lester should be back home within three or four days.

"Then perhaps I can begin to get rid of this hair," Zodiuss suggested. "It's going to take some time to get me back to normal."

"Wait!" said Luna. "There is an uneasy atmosphere. I am not happy."

In spite of the urge to action, he agreed to her suggestion. Maybe, he pondered, it had an emotional background. Luna knew that she would lose her "brother" Zodiuss when Lester departed. Was it just a woman's intuition to gain a few precious last moments?

Nevertheless, Luna was severely practical in her own preparations. It was good policy that she should leave Breslau—not by stealth, but quite openly. For some time she would correspond with friends like Frau Hoffmann. Then, gradually, or suddenly, she would disappear: maybe she would be killed in an air raid—the war offers unusual opportunities of abrupt disappearance.

A knock at the door: Allenstein was there—he had missed the final stages of the drama, as he had been engaged at advanced headquarters in Poland. Eagerly he listened to Zodiuss' rapid summary of the encounters with Hitler.

"Magnificent!" he exclaimed. "My friend, it may be that yours is the outstanding exploit of the war. We have already had reports from our agents planted at German General Headquarters of quarrels between Hitler and his generals. More than that, of quarrels between the generals. Some believe in Hitler's intuitions, some in military science: some want to advance, some to retreat. In the end they will be undecided, and will try each in turn—which

is exactly what we want. And in the Mediterranean—your people should be able to cash in on the situation there. Yet most important, perhaps, are the seeds of defeatism you planted in Hitler's mind."

"Yes, that is why I must get home quickly. All I need now is for some of my forecasts to be fulfilled. I prophesied disaster in North Africa in May—I knew when I left England that we were going to knock out the Axis forces there: now I must see that the date fits. With that prophecy exactly fulfilled, Hitler will never doubt everything else I told him."

"There is one other matter," Allenstein said seriously. "Himmler is on his way here."

"What? But he knows that I am dead."

"Yes. From what you have told me, it looks as if he wants to grab your effects, in case there are any more useful prophecies among them."

"Right! Well, maybe that can be arranged. When does he arrive?"

"Early afternoon."

"In that case, I will put forward the cremation to the morning," Kraus announced.

They discussed the final arrangements. At one time Luna had been apprehensive about her own exit from the scene. Would Hitler, in his despair at the death of Zodius, insist on retaining the services of his junior partner? His fear of Luna as a woman answered that query. There remained the possibility that Himmler or some other interested person might have required her professional services. Evidently it had been well noted, however, that she was no more than an assistant to Zodius—they had probably identified her as his mistress. Hence they had calculated that she could be of no further use to them, and were willing to let her go. Should she be urgently required at any time the Gestapo at Danzig could soon contact her.

As a precaution, Zodius retained his identity until the very moment when the coffin left the house: then his movements were rapid. Luna clipped his hair, and dyed it a dark brown. His eyes were already normal; colour was returning to his cheeks. He looked fifteen years younger.

"Goodbye, Zodius," Luna whispered, as the long hair burned. "I never knew a man like you, and never shall."

"There is an Englishman named Lester who might remind you of your dead brother——"

"I wonder!"

"He will. After you have been in Danzig for some time, word will come to you—a way out. You will arrange to disappear. And a few days later you will be in England, to find Captain Lester waiting for you!"

"I wonder if I shall like him as much as I did Zodius!" she whispered.

"I think that you will."

"What a strange partnership this has been!" she went on. "Our mission did not develop as I expected. It followed its course to Hitler's side along the lines we had planned, but then——"

"You had anticipated something more dramatic?"

"Yes. Having gained his confidence at such peril, I saw us interpreting the stars for Hitler so that he would advance at a time when he should have retreated. Thus he would have lost a battle."

"And we should have lost our heads!"

"That was inevitable, it seemed to me, right from the start. But I see now that your plan was much cleverer. You have not merely planted ideas in Hitler's mind—you have fixed them there firmly. Your death was a masterpiece. Yes, the finale to our mission has not been as dramatic as I anticipated, but we have done more than I hoped. Hitler has not lost a battle—he has lost the war."

"Yes. Though we still have to win it."

"We shall win! But do not let people slumber. My country suffers unbelievable tortures. And do not let your people forget that the Poles were the first to say 'No' to Hitler, and have fought against him continuously for four years. We can defy our enemies, whatever it costs: but we do not wish to be despoiled by our friends. Surely the Russians will see that a friendly Poland is their best guarantee of security in the west? Friendship cannot be imposed. If Russia takes half of Poland by force, how can she expect friendship?"

"Napoleon once said that the situation is never as good and never as bad as it appears to be," he quoted.

"I hope that he is right. Sometimes I feel very weary and hopeless. Contact with your ardent spirit has invigorated me. I want to meet you again—brother!"

"You shall. It will not be long."

"I hold you to that promise. Now, let us prepare for your

journey. Wernski promises a safe trip, and the underground organisation is very good."

For a moment Lester had feared an emotional scene on parting—the sudden descent from the long hours of strain. But Luna recovered grandly. She refused to say a formal goodbye: they would meet again soon. On his part, he repressed the emotional words which he was prompted to say. Without Luna he could have done little or nothing. With her aid, he had probably influenced the whole course of the war. It was true that his moments with Hitler had not been dramatic in the accepted sense, but he was more than satisfied with their result. He might have used his influence to win a single battle. Then Hitler would have been disillusioned—and the military chiefs would have seized the opportunity to grasp a wider measure of power. The disturbing influences which Zodiuss had introduced would yield long-term dividends far more valuable than a single military victory. For the decisive battle of a war is not fought on land, but in the minds of a country's leaders.

It was a spruce business man carrying the passport which had been "borrowed" from a Swedish visitor and slightly amended, who took the train to Berlin, the first stage of a journey which promised to be uneventful. Actually, one dangerous situation did develop. At Berlin Lester was to have gone by air to Stockholm. As he alighted from the train, however, a man in German army uniform whispered a few words to him—and an address. There Lester learned that the Swedish visitor had reported the loss of his passport, and the German police would of course be watching all normal methods of leaving the country.

Lester was disturbed—for his own safety, not for his mission. If he were caught now, the Germans would rejoice in the capture of Captain Lester, the British spy: they could not connect him with the dead Zodiuss. Knowing the fate which awaited him in such circumstances Lester was desperately anxious to avoid it. The confidence of his new host was re-assuring.

"Have no fear, Captain Lester. We had hoped to get you home very quickly, by air. We shall now have to use another method. It will take longer, and has an element of risk, but it has been safely accomplished a hundred times. I have five British airmen to send back to England, and three Americans. I propose to send you back with them. You agree?"

"Excellent! I have heard wonderful stories of your repatriation organisation."

"It is quite good. You may have to remain here for a few days. But then——" *

An hour after Lester had left Breslau, Himmler arrived: he was sympathetic to the sorrowing Luna, but explained that it was necessary that some of the property of Zodiuss, such as the important parchments, should be at the service of the state. Luna agreed without hesitation: she left Himmler and his adjutant alone in Zodiuss' room—they were welcome to all they found.

Himmler was awkwardly sympathetic as he left: he made casual inquiries as to Luna's welfare, and told her to apply to him should she need help.

Now she was alone: the adventure was over. Lester was speeding on his way to freedom. All the loose ends had been bound up: so far as human ingenuity could plan, there was no possibility that any suspicion should be aroused. The basis of Lester's plan was simple: it is not difficult to preach to people what they want to believe. Here was one of the secrets of Hitler's own rise to power: it was only fair that the weapon should be used against him.

The reader was warned that this record of stirring and remarkable events would necessarily end in anti-climax. Lester's own opinion would have agreed with this. Thanks to the efficient underground organisation, his journey back to London was comparatively smooth—tame, indeed, after the excitements and strain of the previous weeks. After he had made a preliminary report to Colonel Metcalfe and had received a shoal of congratulations, he made his way to Podger Cholmondeley's flat. Here his welcome was equally warm.

"Well, Podger," Lester said, parrying his friend's innumerable questions, "let's go out and celebrate my leave. I'll stand you the best dinner war-time London can find."

"Excellent, old boy! I know where to go—and I know exactly how you feel. You must need a lot of excitement—I can tell that from your horoscope."

"What?"

"Yes, old boy. You know those books about astrology you bought and left behind? Well, I've been studying them. They're

* Although readers may be disappointed, for very obvious security reasons the method by which so many British and Allied airmen have been repatriated to England must remain a close secret until after the war. Lester, quite correctly, refused to give any details to me. D.B.

very interesting. Let me read your character. Ah, yes, your birthday is May 8th, isn't it. Yes, you were born under Taurus, the Bull. Listen : ' You are stable. The keynote of your being is to " stay put." You are slow of mind, matter-of-fact, and plodding. You would make a fine desk-official ; you are conservative and unenterprising.' I say, old boy, it isn't very complimentary."

" No, Podger, but it must be true. The stars never lie. Hitler says so. I like the bit about ' staying put.' That's just what I feel like."

" Seriously, old boy, do you think that there's anything in this star business ? "

" A lot, Podger. You ask Hitler. Once the stars fought for him : now they fight against him."

THE END

